

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WIDENER LIBRARY
HX DIKV 3

THE HIDDEN VANTS

FRANCESCA ALEXANDER

Digitized by Google

AL 732.425.10



Harvard College Library

FROM

Mrs. Arthur W. Moors

Digitized by Google

Marion G. Fisher

Christmas 1918. F. B. F.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

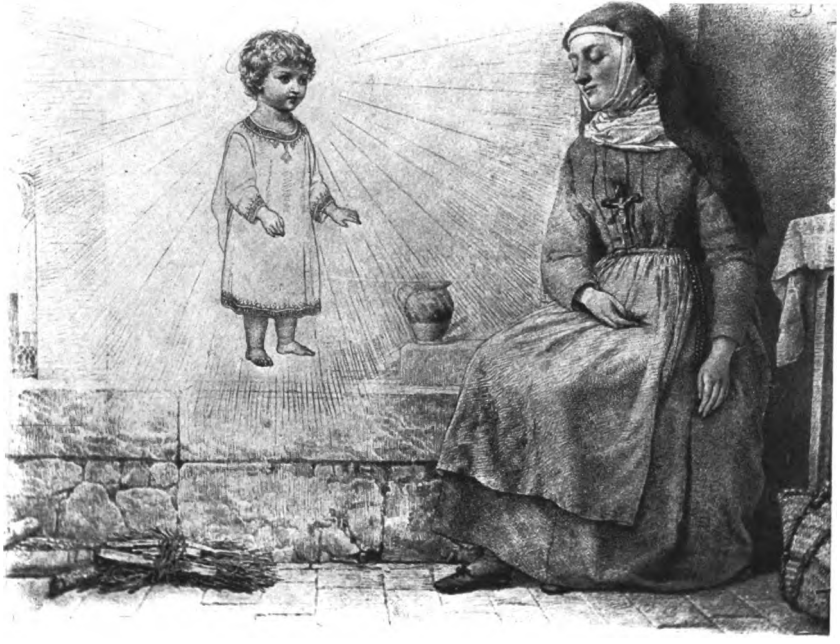
Digitized by Google

THE HIDDEN SERVANTS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Marianna and her Vision by the Fire

From a drawing by the author

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE HIDDEN SERVANTS

and OTHER VERY OLD STORIES · *Told Over Again by* FRANCESCA ALEXANDER

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF IDA,"
"ROADSIDE SONGS OF TUSCANY," Etc.



BOSTON · LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY . . . MCMXVI

Digitized by Google

AL 732.425.10



Copyright, 1900,
By LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

All Rights Reserved

Printers
S. J. PARKHILL & Co., BOSTON, U. S. A.

Digitized by Google

Introduction

TO those who are fortunate enough to know Miss Alexander's pen and pencil pictures of Italian peasant life the very name of Francesca, over which her early work was published, carries with it an aroma as of those humbler graces of her adopted people, — their sunny charity, their native sense of the beautiful, their childlike faith, — which touch the heart more intimately than all their great achievements in History and in Art. For those, however, to whom are yet unknown her faithful transcripts in picture and story from the lives of the people she loves, a word of introduction has been asked; and it was perhaps thought that the task might properly be entrusted to one who had heard *The Hidden Servants* and many another of these poems from the lips of Francesca herself.

Yet, rightly considered, could any experience have better served to banish from the mind such irrelevant intruders as facts, — those literal facts and data at least which the uninitiated might be so mistaken as to desire, but which none who

Digitized by Google

knew Francesca's work could regard as of the slightest consequence?

Imagine a quiet, green-latticed room in Venice overlooking the Grand Canal whose waters keep time in gently audible lappings to the lilt of the verse, — that lilt that is apparent even in the printed line, but which only a voice trained to Italian cadences can perfectly give. Imagine that voice half chanting, half reciting, these old, old legends, and with an absolute sincerity of conviction which stirs the mind of the listeners, mere children of to-day though they be, to a faith akin to that which conceived the tales. Where is there place for facts in such a scene, in such an experience? Or, if facts must be, are not all that are requisite easily to be gleaned from the poems themselves? Why state that Francesca is the daughter of an American artist, or that she has spent her life in Italy, when the artist inheritance, the Italian atmosphere, breathes in every poem our little book contains? Why make mention even of Ruskin's enthusiastic heralding of her work, when the very spirit of it is so essentially that which the great idealist

Digitized by Google

was seeking all his life that he could scarcely have failed to discover and applaud it had it been ever so retiring, ever so hidden? Nor does it matter that the Alexander home chances to be in Florence rather than in Venice, since it is Italy itself that lives in Francesca's work; nor that she is Protestant rather than Catholic, when it is religion pure and simple, unrestricted by any creed, that makes vital each line she writes or draws.

Yet of the poems, if not of the writer, there remained still something to learn, and accordingly a letter of inquiry was sent her; and her own reply, written with no thought of publication, is a better report than another could give. This is what she says:—

"With regard to this present collection of ballads, I can tell its history in a few words. When I was a young girl many old and curious books fell into my hands and became my favourite reading (next to the Bible, and, perhaps, the *Divina Commedia*), as I found in them the strong faith and simple modes of thought which were what I liked and wanted. Afterwards, in

Digitized by Google

my constant intercourse with the country people, and especially with old people whom I always loved, I heard a great many legends and traditions, often beautiful, often instructive, and which, as far as I knew, had never been written down. I was always in request with children for the stories which I knew and could tell, and, as I found they liked these legends, I thought it a pity they should be lost after I should have passed away, and so I always meant to write them down; all the more that I had felt the need of such reading when I was a child myself. But I never had time to write them as long as my eyes permitted me to work at my drawing, and afterwards, when I wanted to begin them, I found myself unable to write at all for more than a few minutes at once. Finally I thought of turning the stories into rhyme and learning them all by heart, so that I could write them down little by little. I thought children would not be very particular, if I could just make the dear old stories vivid and comprehensible, which I tried to do. If, as you kindly hope, they may be good for older people as well, then it must be

Digitized by Google

that when the Lord took from me one faculty He gave me another; which is in no way impossible. And I think of the beautiful Italian proverb: 'When God shuts a door He opens a window.'"

After such an account of the origin and growth of these poems no further comment would seem fitting, unless it be that made by Cardinal Manning when writing to Mr. Ruskin in 1883 to thank him for a copy of Francesca's *Story of Ida*. He writes:—

"It is simply beautiful, like the *Fioretti di San Francesco*. Such flowers can grow in one soil alone. They can be found only in the Garden of Faith, over which the world of light hangs visibly, and is more intensely seen by the poor and the pure in heart than by the rich, or the learned, or the men of culture."

ANNA FULLER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Preface

THE OLD STORY-TELLER

IN my upper chamber here,
Still I wait from year to year;
Wondering when the time will come
That the Lord will call me home.
All the rest have been removed, —
Those I worked for, those I loved;
And, at times, there seems to be
Little use on earth for me.
Still God keeps me — He knows why —
When so many younger die!

From my window I look down
On the busy, bustling town.
But beyond its noise and jar
I can see the hills afar;
And above it, the blue sky,
And the white clouds sailing by;
And the sunbeams, as they shine
On a world that is not mine.

Here I wait, while life shall last,
An old relic of the past,
Feeling strange, and far away

Digitized by Google

From the people of to-day;
Thankful for the memory dear
Of a morning, always near,
Though long vanished, and so fair!
Dewy flowers and April air;
Thankful that the storms of noon
Spent their force and died so soon;
Thankful, as their echoes cease,
For this twilight hour of peace.

But my life, to evening grown,
Still has pleasures of its own.
Up my stairway, long and steep,
Now and then the children creep;
Gather round me, where I sit
All day long, and dream, and knit;
Fill my room with happy noise —
May God bless them, girls and boys!
Then sweet eyes upon me shine,
Dimpled hands are laid in mine;
And I never ask them why
They have sought to climb so high;
For 't were useless to enquire!
'T is a story they desire,

Digitized by Google

Taken from my ancient store,
None the worse if heard before;
And they turn, with pleading looks,
To my shelf of time-worn books,
Bound in parchment brown with age.
Little in them to engage
Children's fancy, one would say!
Yet, when tired with noisy play,
Nothing pleases them so well
As the stories I can tell
From those pages, old and gray,
With their edges worn away;
Spelling queer, and woodcut quaint,
Angel, demon, prince, and saint,
Much alike in face and air;
Houses tipping here and there,
Lion, palm-tree, hermit's cell,
And much more I need not tell.

Then they all attentive wait,
While the story I relate,
And, before the half is told,
I forget that I am old!
But one age there seems to be

Digitized by Google

For the little ones and me.
What though all be new and strange,
Little children never change;
All is shifting day by day, —
Worse or better, who can say?
Much we lose, and much we learn,
But the children still return,
As the flowers do, every year;
Just as innocent and dear
As those babes who first did meet
At our Heavenly Master's feet.
In His arms He took them all:
Oh, 't is precious to recall —
Blessèd to believe it true —
That what we love He loved too!

Since the time when life was new,
All my long, long journey through,
I have story-teller been.
When a child I did begin
To my playmates; later on,
Other children, long since gone,
Came to listen; and of some,
Still the children's children come!

Digitized by Google

Some, the dearest, took their flight,
In the early morning light,
To the glory far away,
Made for them and such as they.
I have lingered till the last;
All the busy hours are past;
Now my sun is in the west,
Slowly sinking down to rest.
Ere it wholly fades from view,
One thing only I would do:
From my stories I would choose
Those 't would grieve me most to lose,
And would tell them once again
For the children who remain,
And for others, yet to be,
Whom on earth I may not see.
Here, within this volume small,
I have thought to write them all;
And to-day the work commence,
Trusting, ere God call me hence,
I may see the whole complete.
It will be a labour sweet,
Calling back, in sunset glow,
Happy hours of long ago.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

Introduction v
Preface xi
The Hidden Servants 1
The Bag of Sand 35
Il Crocifisso della Providenza 49
Angels in the Churchyard 63
The Origin of the Indian Corn 71
The Eldest Daughter of the King 89
Bishop Troilus 101
The Crosses on the Wall 133
Suora Marianna 151
The Lupins 175
The Silver Cross 187
The Tears of Repentance 199

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Hidden Servants
AND OTHER POEMS

THE HIDDEN SERVANTS

A SHELTERED nook on a mountain side,
Shut in, and guarded, and fortified
By rocks that hardly a goat would climb,
All smoothed by tempest and bleached by time —
Such was the spot that the hermit chose,
From youth to age, for his life's repose.
There had he lived for forty years,
Trying, with penance and prayers and tears,
To make his soul like a polished stone
In God's great temple; for this alone
Was the one dear wish that his soul possessed,
And 't was little he cared for all the rest.

Nothing had changed since first he came;
The sky and the mountain were all the same,
Only a beech-tree, that there had grown
Ere ever he builded his cell of stone,
Had risen and spread to a stately grace,
And its shifting shadow filled half the place.

Digitized by Google

Many a winter its storms had spent,
Many a summer its sunshine lent
To the little cell, till it came to look
Like another rock in the peaceful nook.
Mosses and lichen had veiled the wall,
Till it hardly seemed like a dwelling at all.

'T was a peaceful home when the days were soft,
And spring in her sweetness crept aloft
From the plains below where her work was done,
And the hills grew green in the warming sun.
And in summer the cell of the hermit seemed
Like part of that heaven of which he dreamed:
For the turf behind those walls of flint
Was sprinkled with flowers of rainbow tint;
And never a sound but the bees' low hum,
As over the blossoms they go and come;
Or — when one listened — the fainter tones
Of a spring that bubbled between the stones.

But dreary it was on a winter's night,
When the snow fell heavy and soft and white.

Digitized by Google

And at times, when the morn was cold and keen,
The footprints of wolves at his door were seen.
But cold or hunger he hardly felt,
So near to heaven the good man dwelt;
And as for danger — why, death, to him,
Meant only joining the Seraphim!

Poorly he lived, and hardly fared;
And when the acorns and roots he shared
With mole or squirrel, he asked no more,
But thanked the Lord for such welcome store.
The richest feast he could ever know
Was when the shepherds who dwelt below,
Whose sheep in the mountain pastures fed,
Would bring him cheeses, or barley bread,
Or — after harvest — a bag of meal;
And then they would all before him kneel,
On flowery turf or on moss-grown rocks,
To ask a blessing for them and their flocks.

And once or twice he had wandered out
To preach in the country round about,
Where unto many his words were blest;
Then back he climbed to his quiet nest.

Digitized by Google

By all in trouble his aid was sought;
And women their pining children brought,
For a touch of his hand to ease their pain,
And his prayers to make them strong again.

And now one wish in his heart remained:
He longed to know what his soul had gained,
And how he had grown in the Master's grace,
Since first he came to that lonely place.
This wish was haunting him night and day,
He never could drive the thought away.
Until at length in the beech-tree's shade
He knelt, and with all his soul he prayed
That God would grant him to know and see
A man, if such in the world might be,
Whose soul in the heavenly grace had grown
To the self-same measure as his own;
Whose treasure on the celestial shore
Could neither be less than his nor more.
He prayed with faith, and his prayer was heard;
He hardly came to the closing word
Before he felt there was some one there!
He looked, and saw in the sun-lit air

Digitized by Google

An angel, floating on wings of white;
Nor did he wonder at such a sight:
For angels often had come to cheer
His soul, and he thought them always near.
Happy and humble, he bowed his head,
And listened, while thus the angel said:
"Go to the nearest town, and there,
To-morrow, will be in the market square
A mountebank, playing his tricks for show:
He is the man thou hast prayed to know;
His soul, as seen by the light divine,
Is neither better nor worse than thine.
His treasure on the celestial shore
Is neither less than thine own nor more."

Next day, in the dim and early morn,
By a slippery path that the sheep had worn,
The hermit went from his loved abode
To the farms below, and the beaten road.
The reapers, out in the field that day,
Who saw him passing, did often say,
What a mournful look the old man had!
And his very voice was changed and sad.

Digitized by Google

Troubled he was, and much perplexed;
With endless doubting his mind was vexed.
What — He? A mountebank? Both the same?
What could it mean to his soul but shame?
Had his forty years been vainly spent?
And then, alas! as he onward went,
There came an evil and bitter thought, —
Had he been serving the Lord for nought?
But in his fear he began to pray,
And the black temptation passed away.

Perhaps the mountebank yet might prove
To have a soul in the Master's love.
He almost felt that it must be so,
In spite of a life that seemed so low.
Perhaps he was forced such life to take,
It might be, even for conscience' sake;
Some cruel master the order gave,
Perhaps, for scorn of a pious slave.
Or, stay — there were saints in ancient days,
Who had such terror of human praise
That, but to gain the contempt they prized,
They did such things as are most despised;

Digitized by Google

Feigned even madness; and more than one,
Accused of sins he had never done,
Had willingly borne disgrace and blame,
Nor said a word for his own good name!

In thoughts like these had the day gone by;
The sun was now in the western sky:
The road, grown level and hot and wide,
With dusty hedges on either side,
Had led him close to the city gate,
Where he must enter to learn his fate.

Now fear did over his hope prevail:
He almost wished in his search to fail,
And find no mountebank there at all!
For then his vision he well might call
A dream that came of its own accord,
Instead of a message from the Lord!
A few more minutes, and then he knew
That all which the angel said was true!

A mountebank, in the market square,
Was making the people laugh and stare,
With antics more befitting an ape
Than any creature in human shape!

Digitized by Google

The hermit took his place with the rest,
Not heeding the crowd that round him pressed,
And earnestly set his eyes to scan
The face of the poor, unsaintly man.
Alas, there was little written there
Of inward peace or of answered prayer!
For all the paint, and the droll grimace,
'T was a haggard, anxious, weary face.

The mountebank saw, with vague surprise,
The patient, sorrowful, searching eyes,
Whose look, so solemn, and kindly too,
Seemed piercing all his disguises through.
They made him restless, he knew not why:
He could not play; it was vain to try!
His face grew sober, his movements slow;
And, soon as might be, he closed the show.

He saw that the hermit lingered on,
When all the rest of the crowd were gone.
Then over his gaudy clothes he drew
A ragged mantle of faded hue;
And he himself was the first to speak:
"Good Father, is it for me you seek?"

Digitized by Google

"My son, I have sought you all the day;
Would you come with me a little way,
Into some quiet corner near,
Where no one our words can overhear?"

Not far away, in a lonely street,
By a garden wall they found a seat.
It now was late, and the sun had set,
Though a golden glory lingered yet,
And the moon looked pale in it overhead.
They sat them down, and the hermit said:
"My son, to me was a vision sent,
And as yet I know not what it meant;
But I think that you, and you alone,
Are able to make its meaning known.
Answer me then — I have great need —
And tell me, what is the life you lead?"

"My life's a poor one, you may suppose!
I've many troubles that no one knows;
For I have to keep a smiling face.
I wander, friendless, from place to place,
Risking my neck for a scanty gain;
But I must do it, and not complain.

Digitized by Google

I know, whatever may go amiss,
That I have deserved much worse than this."

To the hermit this a meaning bore
Of deep humility, nothing more.
So, gaining courage, "But this," he said,
"Is not the life you have always led.
So much the vision to me revealed;
I know there's something you keep concealed."

The mountebank answered sadly: "Yes!
'T is true: you ask, and I must confess.
But keep my secret, good Father, pray;
Or my life will not be safe for a day!
Alas, I have led a life of crime!
I've been an evil man in my time.
I was a robber — I think you know —
Till little more than a year ago;
One of a desperate, murderous band,
A curse and terror to all the land!"

The hermit's head sank down on his breast;
His trembling hands to his eyes he pressed.

Digitized by Google

"Has God rejected me?" then he moaned:
"Are all my service and love disowned?
Have I been blind, and my soul deceived?"

The other, seeing the old man grieved,
Said: "Father, why do you care so much
For one not worthy your robe to touch?
The Lord is gracious, and if He will,
He can forgive and save me still.
And as for my wicked life, 't is I,
Not you, who have reason to weep and sigh!
Your prayers may help me, and bring me peace."

The hermit made him a sign to cease;
Then raised his head, and began to speak,
With tears on his wrinkled, sun-browned cheek.
"If you could remember even one
Good deed that you in your life have done,
I need not go in despair away.
Think well; and if you can find one, say!"

"Once," said the mountebank, "that was all,
I did for the Lord a service small,
And never yet have I told the tale!

Digitized by Google

But if you wish it, I will not fail.
A few of our men had gone one day —
'T was less for plunder, I think, than play —
To a certain convent, small and poor,
Where a dozen sisters lived secure
For very poverty! dreaming not
That any envied their humble lot.
There, finding the door was locked and barred,
They climbed the wall of a grass-grown yard.
Some vines were planted along its side,
Their trailing branches left room to hide;
Where, neither by pity moved nor shame,
They crouched, till one of the sisters came
To gather herbs for the noonday meal;
Then out from under the leaves they steal!
So she was taken, poor soul, and bound,
And carried off to our camping ground.
A harmless creature, who knew no more
Of the world outside her convent door,
Than you or I of the moon up there!
A shame, to take her in such a snare!

"But, Father, I wished that I had been
Ten miles away, when they brought her in,

Digitized by Google

To hold for ransom; or if that failed —
Oh, well, we knew when the pirates sailed!
We knew their captain, who paid us well,
And carried our prisoners off to sell.
They never beheld their country more,
Being bought for slaves on a foreign shore.

"But oh! 't was enough the tears to bring,
To see that innocent, frightened thing,
Looking, half hopeful, from face to face,
As if she thought, in that wicked place,
There might be one who would take her part!
She looked at me, and it stung my heart.
But I, with a hard, disdainful air,
Turned from her as one who did not care.
I heard her sighing: she did not know
That her gentle look had hurt me so!

"That night they set me the watch to keep;
And when the others were all asleep,
And I had been moving to and fro,
With branches keeping the fire aglow,
I crept along to the woman's side, —
She sat apart, and her arms were tied, —

Digitized by Google

And said, — 't was only a whispered word;
We both were lost if the others heard, —
'If you will trust me and with me come,
I'll bring you safe to your convent home.'
She started, into my face she gazed;
Said she, 'I'll trust you — the Lord be praised!'

"I very quickly the cords unbound.
She rose; I led her without a sound
Between the rows of the sleeping men,
Till we left the camp behind; and then
I found my horse, that was tied near by.
The woman mounted, and she and I
Set off in haste, through the midnight shade,
On the wildest journey I ever made!
By wood and thicket the horse I led,
And over a torrent's stony bed, —
For along the road I dared not go,
For fear that the others our flight should know,
And follow after; the woman prayed.
I, quick and cautious, but not afraid,
Went first, with the stars for guide, until
We saw the convent, high on a hill.

Digitized by Google

We reached the door as the east grew red.
'God will remember!' was all she said;
Her face was full of a sweet content.
She knocked, they opened, and in she went.
The door was closed — she was safe at last!
I heard the bolt as they made it fast —
And I in the twilight stood alone,
With the lightest heart I had ever known!

"So, Father, my robber days were o'er;
I could not be what I was before.
I wandered on with a thankful mind,
For I left the old bad life behind,
And tried, as I journeyed day by day,
To gain my bread in an honest way.
But little work could I find to do;
And so, as some juggling tricks I knew,
I took this business which now you see:
'T is good enough for a man like me!"

While yet the story was going on,
The cloud from the hermit's face had gone;
And if his eyes in the moonlight shone,
They glistened with thankful tears alone.

Digitized by Google

He listened in solemn awe until
The mountebank's tale was done; and still,
Some moments, he neither spoke nor stirred,
But silently pondered every word.

Then humbly speaking, "The Lord," said he,
"Has had great mercy on you and me!
And now, my son, I must tell you why
I came to speak with you — know that I
Have tried with the Lord alone to dwell,
For forty years, in my mountain cell;
In prayer and solitude, day and night,
Have striven to keep my candle bright!
And there, but yesterday, while I prayed,
An angel came to my side, and said
That I should seek you, — and told me where, —
And should your life with my own compare;
For in God's service and love and grace
Your soul with mine has an equal place,
We both alike have his mercy shared,
The same reward is for both prepared.
I came; I sought you — and you know how
I found you out in the square just now!

Digitized by Google

At which — may the Lord forgive my pride! —
At first I was poorly satisfied.
But now I have heard your story through —
What you in a single night could do! —
And know that this to the Lord appears
Worth all my service of forty years;
I can but wonder, and thank His grace
Which raised us both to an equal place."

"But, Father, it never can be true!
What? — I by the side of a saint like you?
Ah no! You never to me were sent.
'T was some one else whom the angel meant!"

"No! Listen to me — 'T was *you*, my son!
Our Master said that a service done
To a child of His in time of need
Is done to Himself in very deed,
And is with love by Himself received!
So do not think I have been deceived.
But keep those words on your heart engraved
Of the humble woman whose life you saved,
God will remember, and trust His care.
He will not forget you here nor there!"

Digitized by Google

"O Father, Father! And can it be
That the Lord in heaven remembers me?
And yet I had felt it must be true,
For the woman spoke as if she knew!
But when was ever such mercy shown,
And is this the love He bears His own?
Are these the blessings He holds in store?
Oh, let me serve Him for evermore!"

And when, at the close of another day,
The hermit wearily made his way
Up the mountain path, from stone to stone,
He did not climb to his cell alone.
The mountebank, still with wondering face,
Came with him up to that peaceful place!

Together with thankful hearts they went,
Thenceforth together their lives were spent.
And, ere the summer had reached its close,
Another cell from the rocks arose;
The beech, in its strong and stately growth,
Spread one green canopy over both.
On summer evenings, when shepherds guide
Their flocks to rest on the mountain side,

Digitized by Google

They heard above, in the twilight calm,
Two voices, chanting the evening psalm;
And one was agèd, and one was young,
But never was hymn more sweetly sung!

In love and patience, by deed and word,
They helped each other to serve the Lord,—
Together to pray, to learn, to teach,—
Till a deeper blessing fell on each.
Their souls grew upward from day to day;
But he who farthest had gone astray,
Who, lowest fallen, had hardest striven,
Who most had sinned and been most forgiven,
Erelong in the heavenly race outran
The older, milder, and wiser man.
Two years he dwelt with his agèd friend,
Then made a blessèd and peaceful end;
And, when his penitent life was done,
The hermit wept as he would for a son!

Ten years had over the mountain passed,
Since that poor mountebank breathed his last,
Helped, to the end, by a woman's prayer.
Ten years; and the hermit still was there.

Digitized by Google

Grown older, thinner, with shoulders bent,
He seldom forth from his shelter went.
But those he had helped in former days
With prayers and counsel, in thousand ways,
Were mindful of him, and brought him all
He needed now, for his wants were small.
And happy they were their best to give,
If only their mountain saint would live!
For in his living their lives were blest;
And if he longed for the perfect rest,
Patient he was, and content to wait,
While God should please, at the heavenly gate.
Beautiful now his face had grown,
But the beauty was something not his own, —
A solemn light from the blessèd land
Within whose border he soon must stand.
Little he said, but his every word
Was saved and treasured by those who heard,
To be a blessing in years to come,
When he should be theirs no more; and some
Who brought their little to help his need,
Went home with their souls enriched indeed!

Digitized by Google

One autumn morning he sat alone,
Outside his cell; and the warm sun shone
With a friendly light on his silver hair,
Through the branches, smooth and almost bare,
Of the beech-tree, now, like him, grown old.
The night before had been sharp and cold;
And the frost was white on leaf and stem
Wherever the rocks still shaded them,
But where the sunbeams had found their way,
In glittering, crystal drops it lay;
And fallen leaves at his feet were strewn,
Yellow and wet, over turf and stone.

He sat and dreamed, as the agèd do,
While, drifting backward, he lived anew
The years that never again should be.
A placid dream — for his soul was free
From all the troubles of long ago,
The doubts, the conflict he used to know!
Doubts of himself, and a contest grim
With evil spirits that strove for him.
Now all was over; that troubled day
Was like a storm that had passed away.

Digitized by Google

It seemed to him that his voyage was o'er;
His ship already had touched the shore.
Yet once he sighed; for he knew that he
Was not the man he had hoped to be,
And, looking back on his journey past,
He felt — what all of us feel at last!
And his soul was moved to pray once more
The prayer he had made twelve years before, —
Only to know, before he died,
If he were worthy to stand beside
One of God's children, or great or small,
Who served Him truly; and that was all!

It was not long ere the angel came,
Who, gently calling the saint by name,
Said: "Come, for thou hast not far to go.
One step, and I to thine eyes will show
The very dwelling that shelters now
Two souls as near to the Lord as thou!"

The hermit rose; and with reverent tread
He followed on as the angel led.
Where a single cleft the rocks between
Gave passage out of the valley green

Digitized by Google

They passed, and stood in the pathway steep:
The rocks about them were sunken deep
In fern, and bramble, and purple heath,
That sloped away to the woods beneath;
While far below, and on every side,
Were endless mountains, and forests wide,
And scattered villages here and there,
That all looked near in the clear, dry air.
And here a church, with its belfry tall;
And there a convent, whose massive wall
Rose grave and stately above the trees.
The hermit willingly looked at these;
For hope they gave him that now, at least,
Some praying brother or toiling priest
Might be his mate; but it was not so!
The angel showed him, away below,
A slope where a little mountain-farm
Lay, all spread out in the sunshine warm,
Along the side of a wooded hill.
It looked so peaceful and far and still!
And when his eye on the farmhouse fell,
The angel said: "It is there they dwell!
Two women in heart and soul like thee.
Go, find them, Brother, and thou shalt see

Digitized by Google

All that thou art in their lives displayed."
Before the hermit an answer made,
The angel back to the skies had flown;
He stood in the rocky path alone.

Along the broken and winding way
Between the heath and the boulders gray;
Through lonely pastures that led him down
To oaken woods in their autumn brown;
And o'er the stones of a rippling stream,
The hermit passed, like one in a dream!
As though the vision had made him strong:
He hardly knew that the way was long.

'T was almost noon when he came in sight
Of the little farmhouse, low and white:
A sheltered lane by the orchard led,
Where mountain ash, with its berries red,
Rose high above him; and brambles, grown
All over the rough, low wall of stone,
And tangled brier with thorny spray,
And feathered clematis, edged the way.
Then, turning shortly, a view he caught
Of both the women for whom he sought.

Digitized by Google

One, spinning, sat by the open door;
Her spindle danced on the worn stone floor.
The other, just from the forest come,
Had brought a bundle of branches home,
And spread them now in the sun to dry;
But both looked up as the saint drew nigh.
Then, on a sudden, the spindle stopped,
The branches all on the grass were dropped.
He heard them joyfully both exclaim,
"The Saint! The hermit!" And forth they came
To bid him welcome, and made request
That he would enter their house to rest.

But when a blessing they both implored,
He had not courage to speak the word.
The only blessing his lips let fall
Was this: "May the good Lord bless us all,
And keep our hearts in His peace divine!"
With hand uplifted, he made the sign,
Then entered in (to their joy complete!)
And willingly took the offered seat.

And soon before him a meal was spread,
Of chestnuts, of goat's milk cheese, and bread;

Digitized by Google

While one with her pitcher went to bring
Some water fresh from the ice-cold spring.

He could not taste of the food prepared
Till he his errand to both declared.
Said he: "My friends, I have come to-day
With something grave on my mind to say,
And more to hear; and I pray you now
To answer truly, and not allow
A feeling, whether of pride or shame,
Or any shrinking from praise or blame,
To change the answer you both may give,
Of what you are and of how you live."

Then she with distaff still at her side,
Of speech more ready, at once replied.
In years the elder, but not in face,
She kept a little of youthful grace:
The dark eyes under her snow-white hair
Were keen and clear as the autumn air!

"We are but what we appear to be:
Two toiling women, as you may see!
And neither so young nor strong as when

Digitized by Google

In field and forest we helped the men.
We now have only the lesser care,
To keep the house, and the meals prepare,
And other labours of small account,
Yet something worth in the week's amount.
But in our youth, and a lifetime through,
We laboured, much as the others do!
Through storm and sunshine we still have tried
To do our best by our husbands' side,
And keep their hearts and our own at rest
When sickness came or when want oppressed.
For even famine our house assailed
That year when the corn and chestnuts failed.
And once — that winter ten years ago —
Our house was buried beneath the snow,
And ere it melted and light returned,
The very benches for warmth we burned!
Nor is there want, in our busy hive,
Of children keeping the house alive:
For she has seven, and I have nine;
But three of hers and the first of mine
Are safe with Jesus, — more happy they!
Two more have married and gone away.

Digitized by Google

My son's young wife, with her infant small,
Make up the household — fourteen in all."

"In this," he said, "there is much to praise:
In humble service you pass your days,
And spend your life for your children's needs.
But tell me now of the pious deeds
(For such there are) that you seek to hide,
To me in a vision signified!"

"But, sir, we are just two poor old wives,
Who never have done in all our lives
A pious deed that was worth the name!"
She said; and her white head drooped with shame.

Then said the other: "And yet, 't is true,
We help in all that our husbands do.
When twice a year they have killed a sheep,
'T is only half for ourselves we keep;
Our poorer neighbours have all the rest.
And this, I fear, is the very best
We ever do!" "And," said he, "'t is well!
But think — is there nothing more to tell?"

Digitized by Google

They both were silent a little space,
And each one questioned the other's face,
Till, doubtful, when she had thought awhile,
The elder said, with a modest smile:
"This summer have forty years gone by,
Since she — my sister-in-law — and I
Together came in this house to dwell;
And, Father, it is not much to tell,
But in all these years, from first to last,
No angry word has between us passed,
Nor even a look that was less than kind.
And that is all I can call to mind."

Enough it was for the hermit's need!
He rose, like one from a burden freed.
"Thank God!" he said; "if indeed He sees
My soul as worthy and white as these!
And great the mercy He doth bestow,
That I should His hidden servants know!"

A sudden flash, as of heavenly light,
Then shone within him, and all was bright;
And in a moment were things made clear
Had vexed him many a weary year!

Digitized by Google

For he, who had thought on earth to view
God's people only a scattered few,
Saw now, in spirit, an army great
Of hidden servants who on Him wait.
No saintly legends their names disclose,
And no man living their number knows,
Nor can their service and place declare.
The hidden servants are everywhere!
And some are hated, despised, alone;
And some to even themselves unknown.
But the Father's house has room for all,
And never one from His hand can fall!
The one brave deed of a desperate man,
Grown hard in crime since his youth began,
Who yet, for a helpless woman's sake,
Had strength to rise, and his chain to break;
The holy sweetness that fills the heart
Of him who dwells from the world apart,
His life one dream of celestial things,
Till almost heaven to earth he brings;
Or yet the humble, unnoticed life
Of toiling mother and patient wife,
Who, year on year, has had grace to bear
Her changeless burden of daily care,—

Digitized by Google

Are all accepted with equal love,
And laid with treasures that wait above
Until the day when we all believe
That every man shall his deeds receive.

And when, that evening, with weary feet
The hermit stood by his lone retreat,
And watched awhile, with a tranquil gaze,
The mountains soft in the sunset haze,
And sleeping forest, and field below,
He said, as he saw the star-like glow
Of lights in the cottage windows far,
"How many God's hidden servants are!"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Bag of Sand

Digitized by Google

THE BAG OF SAND was written by St. Heradius, who visited, some time in the fifth century, the hermit fathers of the desert and mountains, and collected many interesting stories about them.

Digitized by Google

The Bag of Sand

IN that land of desolation
Where, mid dangers manifold,
Lost in heavenly contemplation,
Desert fathers dwelt of old,

Lay a field where grass was growing
Green beneath the palm-trees' shade;
And a spring, forever flowing,
Life amid the stillness made.

There a brotherhood, incited
By one hope and purpose high,
Came to dwell in faith united,
Pray and labour, live and die.

Mighty was the love that bound them,
Each to each, in that wild land,
Where the desert closed around them,
One dead waste of rocks and sand,

Saving where, to rest their eyes on,
While they dreamed of hills divine,
Blue, above the low horizon,
Stretched the mountains' wavy line.

Digitized by Google

There could nought of earth remind them,
Nor disturb their dreams and prayers;
They had left the world behind them,
Felt no more its joys and cares.

Far from all its weary bustle,
Will subdued, and mind at ease,
They could hear the palm-trees rustle
In the early morning breeze.

When the bell, to prayer inviting,
From the low-built belfry rang,
They could hear the birds uniting
With them while the psalms they sang.

From the earth their labour brought them
All they needed — scanty fare.
Life of toil and hardship taught them,
Though at peace, the cross to bear.

This is all their record: never
Can we hope the rest to know!
Names and deeds are lost forever,
In the mist of long ago;

And of all that life angelic
Neither shadow left, nor trace,
Save this tale, — a precious relic,
In its wise and saintly grace!

Digitized by Google

This, above the darkness lifted
By the truth that in it lay,
On the sea of time has drifted,
And is still our own to-day.

Listen to it, it may teach us
Wisdom, with its words of gold!
Let this far-off blessing reach us
From the desert saints of old.

UNDERNEATH the vines they tended,
Where the garden air was sweet,
Where the shadows, softly blended,
Made an ever cool retreat, —

These good brethren had assembled,
On their abbot to attend;
All were sad, and many trembled,
Thinking how the day would end.

Of their little congregation
One who long had faithful been,
Had, beneath a sore temptation,
Fallen into grievous sin.

Digitized by Google

What it was they have not told us,
But we know, whate'er the blame,
If God's hand should cease to hold us,
You or I might do the same.

And for judgment's wise completing
(Now the crime was certified),
All were called in solemn meeting
On the sentence to decide.

Much in doubt, they craved assistance,
Sent to convents far away,
Even to that fair blue distance
Where their eyes had loved to stray.

Fathers learnèd, fathers saintly,
Abbots used to think and rule,
Gathered where the brook sang faintly
In the shadow, green and cool.

Oh the beauty that was wasted
On that day, remembered oft!
Oh the sweetness, all untasted,
Of the morning, still and soft!

Digitized by Google

At their feet the water glistened,
Birds were nesting overhead;
No one saw, and no one listened
Save to what the speakers said.

Long and sad was their debating,
Voices low and faces grave,
While, the gloomy tale relating,
Each in turn his judgment gave.

"Send him from you!" one was saying
Calmly, as of reason sure;
"All are tainted by his staying,
Let men know your hands are pure!

"For the shame and sorrow brought you,
Let him be to all as dead!
Harm sufficient has he wrought you!"
But the abbot shook his head.

For the sin which had undone him,
For much evil brought about,
He would lay a burden on him,
But he could not cast him out!

Digitized by Google

All night long the distant howling,
While he waked, of beasts of prey,
Made him think of demons prowling,
Come to snatch that soul away.

Said another: "I would rather
That his shame by all were seen.
Do not spare him, O my Father;
Let the blow be swift and keen!

"Let not justice be evaded!
Keep him, bound to labour hard,
With you, but apart degraded,
And from speech with all debarred!"

This the abbot not refusing,
Only wondered, while he thought,
Was there no one feared the losing
Of a soul the Lord had bought?

One, more thoughtless, recommended
That in prison closely pent
He should stay till life was ended!
But to this would none consent.

Digitized by Google

In the cell where first they closed him,
Shrinking back, as best he might,
From a window that exposed him
Sometimes to a passer's sight,

He, the black offender, waited,
From them parted since his fall:
Once beloved, now scorned and hated
By himself, he thought by all!

Nothing asking, nothing pleading,
Speechless, tearless, in despair;
But, like one in pain exceeding,
Moving ever here and there.

Little did his fate alarm him:
What had he to fear or shun?
What could others do to harm him
More than he himself had done?

But without were minds divided,
And the morning wore away;
Noon had come, and undecided
Still the heavy question lay.

Digitized by Google

Though they looked so stern and fearless,
Some with sinking hearts had come, —
Hearts that wept when eyes were tearless,
Pleaded when the lips were dumb.

One who had that morning seen him,
Seeking from their gaze to hide,
Tried from heavy doom to screen him;
But his reasons were denied.

He of other days was thinking, —
Happy days, and still so near! —
When that brother, shamed and shrinking,
Had to all their souls been dear.

Others tried their hearts to harden,
Felt their pity to be sin;
Silent, prayed the Lord to pardon
Kinder thoughts that rose within.

Some proposed and some objected,
While, the long debate to end,
One old Father they expected,
And on him would all depend.

Digitized by Google

He — their honoured, best adviser —
Dwelt in desert cave retired;
Older than the rest, and wiser:
Many thought his words inspired;

Said he knew what passed within them
When by sin or doubt assailed;
True it is, his words could win them,
Often, when all else had failed.

He would find what all were seeking,
Justice pure, and judgment right!
Still the abbot, seldom speaking,
Pale and sober, prayed for light.

Light was sent! For, toiling slowly
O'er the sun-baked desert road,
Came that Father, wise and holy,
Bent beneath a weary load!

Scarce his failing limbs sustained him,
For the burden sorely pressed:
Many times, as though it pained him,
Would he stand to breathe and rest.

Digitized by Google

One who watched for his arriving,
Went and told them he was near.
Up they rose, and ceased their striving,
In their joy such news to hear!

Then they all went forth and met him,
By their reverent love compelled:
Nevermore could one forget him,
Who that day his face beheld!

Wasted, worn, yet strong to aid them;
Peaceful, though by conflict tried;
Shining with a light that made them
Feel the Lord was by his side!

But it grieved their souls to see him
By that burden bowed and strained!
Many stretched their hands to free him,
Wondering what the sack contained.

"Why this burden?" one addressed him;
"All unfit for arms like thine!"
He, while yet the weight oppressed him,
Answered: "These are sins of mine.

Digitized by Google

"I must bear them all, my brother,
Ever with me while I go
On my way to judge another!
These have made my journey slow."

Then the abbot, growing bolder,
Raised the load with trembling hand
From the Father's bended shoulder;
Looked — and found it filled with sand.

Of them all, there was not any
But was silent for a while;
For the best had sins as many
As the sand-grains in that pile!

Then they heard the abbot saying,
"God alone must judge us all!"
And a burden, heavy weighing,
Seemed from every heart to fall.

Awed and hushed, but no more keeping
Pity crushed, or love restrained,
Some were smiling, some were weeping;
Of their striving what remained?

Digitized by Google

Many bowed in veneration;
Others all in haste to go
With a word of consolation
To their brother fallen low.

Hope they brought, and gentler feeling,
To his torn, despairing breast,
And that evening found him kneeling
In the chapel with the rest.

None arose to judge or sentence:
He whose sin they most deplored,
In his long and sad repentance,
Was with charity restored.

Digitized by Google

Il Crocifisso della Providenza

Digitized by Google

THE crucifix about which this story is told is still to be seen in the church of the Carmine, where it is kept in the Corsini chapel; and it is always shown to the public on the first of May, when also (as the ballad relates) a *festa* is held in the house once occupied by the three sisters, in the Via dell' Orto.

The house seems to have been little changed since they lived there; it now bears the number 10, and is easily recognized by a niche in the wall, containing a representation of the crucifix, and the chest piled with loaves.

From time immemorial, a lamp burns every night before this little shrine: the oil is provided by the poor women of the vicinity (and they are very poor indeed), each one laying by a few *centesimi* every week for the purpose.

Digitized by Google

Il Crocifisso della Providenza

THE streets of Florence are fair to see,
With palace and church and tower,
And there the mighty of earth have dwelt,
And the whole world feels their power.

And many come from the East and West
To gaze on its beauty rare;
To stand where the wise and great have stood,
For their presence is ever there.

But they never think of the narrow streets
Where the poor of the city dwell;
Those humble houses, so bare and plain,
Have tales of their own to tell.

There's one by the San Frediano gate,
Not far from the city wall;
Some Latin words on its front engraved
The memory still recall

Digitized by Google

Of one, a beggar, to all unknown,
Who knocked at the door one day;
Of what a blessing he left behind
That morn when he went his way.

It happened hundreds of years ago,
But they tell the story still;
So listen now to the legend old,
And smile at it if you will.

But if you smile, be it not in scorn;
The tale which I now relate
Has lightened many a heavy heart
By the San Frediano gate.

Long since, they say, in that ancient house
There were orphan maidens three,
And in the chamber above the door,
Whose window you still may see,

They worked and prayed, by the world unseen;
And ever, the long day through,
The needles stitched, and the spindle twirled,
And the knitted garment grew.

Digitized by Google

So young, and one of them yet a child,
With never an earthly friend;
They prayed each day for the daily bread
Which they knew the Lord would send.

And toiling cheerfully, lived content,
Nor ever of want complained,
But freely shared with the needy poor
The little their labour gained.

But evil days to the sisters came,
And their faith was sorely tried:
A merchant, one of the first in town,
That winter had failed and died.

And many debts had he left behind,
And their work was all unpaid;
For he it was who had bought and sold
The delicate wares they made.

They prayed for help, and they sought for work;
But awhile they sought in vain.
They pledged the ring that their father wore,
And their mother's golden chain.

Digitized by Google

Then work they found, but for neighbours poor,
And some of them could not pay;
'T was well for them that the spring began,
And the cold had passed away.

And one by one, as the days went on,
Were the household treasures sold, —
The copper pitcher, the brazen lamp,
And the nut-wood table old,

The pot of pinks from the window-sill —
But when they had sold them all,
An ancient crucifix, carved in wood,
Still hung on the whitewashed wall

Above the chest where the loaves were kept;
Such blessing its presence shed,
It seemed to them like a living friend,
And not like an image dead!

In all their troubles, in all their joys,
That crucifix bore a part;
Above all comfort, or wealth, or gain,
'T was dear to the sisters' heart!

Digitized by Google

As babes, before they could understand,
Or ever a prayer repeat,
Each day their father had held them up,
While they kissed the carven feet.

So April came, and so April went;
And they lived, the Lord knows how!
The elder sister had saved and spared,
But the chest was empty now.

That very evening she broke in halves,
And gave to the younger two,
One piece of bread — 't was the last they had;
There was nothing more to do,

Unless, unless — and she looked at them,
And then at the image dear:
She touched it once; but her hand drew back
With a guilty, shrinking fear.

Her sisters saw, and they started up,
And they said in haste, "Not so!
Take back the bread, if there be no more;
The crucifix must not go!"

Digitized by Google

And she took courage, and kissed them both,
And smiled, though her eyes were wet;
Then looked again at the face beloved,
And said, "He will help us yet!"

They rose next day with the early dawn,
And their hearts were almost light!
The young need little to make them glad,
And the day was fair and bright.

And pleasant 't is to behold the sun,
Though his rosy-tinted ray
Could only shine on the moss-grown tiles
Of the roof across the way.

And the air was sweet in the narrow street
Where the swallows toss and glide;
For a perfume came on the morning breeze
From the hills on every side,—

A perfume faint from the woods afar,
From blossoming fields of corn;
And bells already their chimes began,
For this was a sacred morn.

Digitized by Google

The Carmine church is near at hand,
And the sisters thither hied;
'T was there they had knelt in happy days
By the dear dead mother's side.

Then home, through the gay and festive street,
Till they reached the chamber bare:
The time had come for the morning meal,
And alas, no bread was there!

The elder girl on her sisters looked,
And her face grew white with pain.
Then said the one who was next in age,
"Let us ask the Lord again!"

So down they knelt on the red-tiled floor,
And the elder bowed her head,
And said aloud, while the others joined,
The prayer for their daily bread.

And then, with a tempest in her heart
That she could no more withstand,
With her arm around the younger girl,
And the other by the hand,

Digitized by Google

She pleaded, raising her tearful face
To the dying face above,
For those she loved in their helpless state
With more than a sister's love.

"O blessed Jesus! O Lord divine!
Have pity, we wait for Thee!
Look down — Thou seest our empty chest,
Thou knowest how poor we be!

"Oh, send some bread to my sisters dear,
For the cornfields all are Thine!
I'd rather lie in my grave to-day
Than to see these children pine!

"Thou knowest, Lord, I have done my best;
But my hands have failed at length:
A mother's burden is on me laid
With only a maiden's strength.

"Come, help me! Look at these orphan girls!
Oh, save them from want and woe! —"
Her praying ceased, for they heard a sound,
A knock at the door below.

Digitized by Google

They rose, and all to the window went:
A beggar was at the door,
A poor, pale stranger, with staff in hand,
Who had never come before.

The Month of Mary was coming in;
And many were on their way
To ask for alms in the Virgin's name
On that beautiful first of May.

"My little sisters," the beggar said,
(And bowed to the maidens three,)
"I pray you spare from your table spread
A morsel of bread for me!

"I come from far, and I 've far to go;
And I've eaten nought to-day!"
The elder wept, but she answered not;
And the second turned away.

The younger looked with her innocent eyes
In the beggar's pleading face:
"And if we could, we would give you food;
But we're in as hard a case!

Digitized by Google

"We finished yesterday all we had —
The half of a loaf, no more! —
We just were asking the Lord for bread,
When we heard you at the door."

"Go, look in the chest, my little maid;
You 'll find there is bread to spare!"
"Alas, we have looked so many times,
And never a crust is there!"

"Look once again, for the love of Him
Whose image I see within:
He never has failed to help His own,
And He will not now begin."

So only lest it should seem unkind
To refuse the small request,
The elder girl with a patient smile
Went back to the empty chest.

She looked — and down on her knees she fell,
With a cry of glad surprise:
The others turned, and their breath stood still,
They could scarce believe their eyes!

Digitized by Google

'T was full! And the loaves were piled so high
They could close the lid no more.
Their tears fell faster for joy that day
Than they fell for grief before!

But in the midst of their thankful praise
They thought of the starving man:
The little one seized the topmost loaf,
And back to the window ran.

She looked, she called him — he was not there!
They sought him, but all in vain:
He passed away from their sight that day,
And he came no more again.

So ends the story; but ever since
That crucifix bears the name
La Provideнza; and even now
The house has a sacred fame.

And many kneel where the sisters knelt
Each year on the first of May;
And the floor is all bestrewn with flowers,
And leaves of the scented bay.

Digitized by Google

The humble room is with roses decked,
And bright with the candles' glow;
And smoke of incense, and sound of psalm,
Float over the street below.

A woman agèd and silver-haired
Once told me, with solemn thrill,
How she herself had beheld the chest,
Which stands in the chamber still.

I asked her: "Who was that beggarman?
An angel, do you suppose?
A saint from heaven?" Her face grew grave,
And she answered me, "Who knows?"

And then, with voice to a whisper dropped,
With an awed, mysterious air,
"Some think," she said, "'t was the Lord Himself
Who came at the maiden's prayer."

Digitized by Google

Angels in the Churchyard

Digitized by Google

THE story of the "Angels in the Churchyard" was told me by Signore Bortolo Zanchetta of Bassano, who said that he read it in an old book, but he had lost the book, and could not even remember its name.

Digitized by Google

Angels in the Churchyard

A SAINT there was, long time ago,
And all in vain I tried
His name to learn, or whence he came,
Or how or where he died.

For he from whom the tale I heard
Could tell me nothing more
Save only that within him dwelt
Of love an endless store.

And in the churchyard once he passed
A summer night in prayer,
For pity of the nameless dead
Who lie forgotten there.

He knew not when the sun went down,
So earnestly he prayed!
He knew not when the twilight glow
Was lost in deepening shade.

Digitized by Google

And when the fair, round moon arose
Behind the wooded hill,
She looked across the churchyard wall,
And found him praying still.

But when the night was far along,
And when the moon was high,
When all the village lights were out,
And closed was every eye, —

When low above the sleeping dead
The folded daisies slept,
And he alone his patient watch
Until the morning kept, —

Came angels through the churchyard gate,
But in no heavenly guise;
So unadorned, he little thought
They came from Paradise!

The moon lit up their robes of white;
No other glory shone.
He watched them, as they paused before
One sunken, moss-grown stone,

Digitized by Google

And thrice their silver censers swung,
As at some saintly shrine,
But never incense burnt on earth
Had perfume so divine.

Between the graves they glided on:
Toward a cross they turned —
A wooden cross that bore no name —
And there the incense burned.

A fading garland on it hung,
Of wild flowers simply twined;
Whoever lay in that poor grave
Had left some love behind.

But next they sought a dreary place
Against the northern wall;
He could not see if mound were there,
The nettles grew so tall!

And on to others, three or four,
Their noiseless steps they bent:
Where'er they stayed, the incense rose;
Then, as they came, they went.

Digitized by Google

But often to that churchyard green
Did he at night repair;
And ever, when the hour returned,
The angels all were there.

He thought them only white-robed priests;
And much he wondered why
Each night at certain graves they stayed,
While others they passed by.

Till, after waiting, wondering long,
One night he forward pressed,
And spoke with one who walked apart,
A step behind the rest.

'T was starlight now; the moon had waned:
He hardly saw the face
Of him he talked with; but he felt
Great peace was in the place.

"Of God's own saints," the angel said,
"A few lie buried here;
And He so loves them that to Him
Their very dust is dear!

Digitized by Google

"So, while their souls with perfect peace
Are in His presence blest,
He will not that these humble graves
Should all unhonoured rest.

"Each night from heaven He sends us down,
Where'er His flowers are sown —
These bodies that shall one day rise,
All glorious like His own!"

The saint was silent, for his lips
Could find no word to say:
He stood entranced, and like to one
Whose soul is far away.

At length he roused; the stars were dim,
The night had half withdrawn:
A light was in the eastern sky,
The clear pale light of dawn.

Then came a freshening in the air,
A twitter in the trees,
A ripple in the dewy grass
That felt the early breeze;

Digitized by Google

And sounded from the tower above
The sweet-toned, ancient bell;
While bright and busy over all
The summer morning fell.

The daisies opened; happy birds
Sang in the sunshine free.
The dead alone are sleeping now;
Their morning is to be.

Digitized by Google

The Origin of the Indian Corn

Digitized by Google

THIS story was told me by the Contessa Vittoria Percoto Antonini of Palmanuova, who said that she heard it in her youth at a *Fila*, which is a sort of social gathering held in the winter evenings by the *contadini* in that part of the country.

The winter is cold, and these *contadini*, who are very poor and can ill afford the wood for a fire, meet in the cattle-shed, where the breath of cows and oxen warms the air a little.

They often say, "It is the way that the Gesù Bambino was warmed!" A lantern hangs from one of the beams overhead, and by its dim light the women spin or knit. All talk together, and (as the Contessa Vittoria expresses it) "the boys make themselves agreeable to the girls, very much as though it were a party of ladies and gentlemen."

And from time to time the elder people entertain the company with stories, of which this is a pretty fair specimen.

Digitized by Google

The Origin of the Indian Corn: A Legend of Friuli

IN the far Italian border land,
With its rolling hills and mountains grand,
And the Alps of Carnia rising near,
Where the snow lies more than half the year;
With crags where the clinging fir-trees grow
Above the chestnuts and vines below,
From the weary, changing world remote, —
There age on age doth a legend float.
The young have learnt it from agèd men;
It never was written yet with pen.
It seems at first, when they tell it o'er,
A childish fancy, and nothing more;
And bearing the impress, deep indeed,
Of the hard and struggling lives they lead:
A thing to smile at, and then forget,
Scarce worthy a passing thought — and yet
The simple tale may a lesson teach
If only one can its meaning reach!
Like one of their living, hill-side springs,
That shows the image of common things;

Digitized by Google

So he who looks on its surface sees
The bending flowers, the arching trees,
The sun, the shadow, the rocks, the sky,
The busy birds that go flitting by,
While deep below is the endless wealth
Of water, given for life and health.

In homely form is the lesson taught;
But worthy still of a reverent thought.
So listen, think; if you have a mind
To seek, and the hidden treasure find:
For Truth, most precious and fair, doth dwell
In the crystal depth of this mountain well.

And this is the story, often told
In the winter evenings long and cold;
In the low-roofed, dimly lighted shed,
Where the breath of oxen serves instead
Of a blazing hearth to warm the place:
A smile of peace is on every face,
And hearts are light, and they often say,
"Our Lord was warmed in the self-same way,
That night when He on the earth was born!"
And the shed no longer seems forlorn,

Digitized by Google

For it makes them feel Him near at hand:
And they the better can understand
How by His pity and timely aid
The beautiful Indian corn was made.

'T was in the days when He dwelt below,
Before 't was given to man to know
Or who He was or from whence He came;
And the world had hardly heard His name!
He journeyed over the country roads,
He taught the poor, and He eased their loads.
He had no dwelling wherein to rest
With the one or two who loved Him best,
And once in seeking a friendly door
They came to a farmer's threshing-floor.
The hot July had but just begun;
The road lay white in the blinding sun;
The air was heavy with odours sweet;
The sky was pale, as if faint with heat.
Two weary men and two women pale
Were threshing, each with a heavy flail, —
A mile away you could hear the sound
In measured cadence along the ground.
Then, moved with pity at such a sight,

Digitized by Google

It pleased Him to make their burden light.
At first He prayed them to pause and rest;
They only smiled at the strange request,
And laboured on till He spoke again:
"Fear not, Myself I will thresh the grain!"

At sound of His holy voice, they knew
That what He said He would surely do!
He bade them bring Him a burning brand,
And, though they little could understand,
The brand was brought, and they saw Him bend,
And touch the corn with the lighted end.
Then swiftly, as by a tempest blown,
The straw to the farther side was thrown;
The wheaten kernels, all clear and bright,
Lay piled on high — 't was a pleasant sight!
Another and smaller heap contained
The chaff, and whatever else remained.
'T was threshed and winnowed, and all in one;
The work of days in a moment done!
The happy threshers, with one accord,
Gave thanks and praise to the blessèd Lord:
And grateful tears at His feet were shed.

Digitized by Google

Meanwhile the news through the village spread;
For more than one had been near, and seen
The miracle of the wheat made clean.
From field and garden and cottage door,
The people flocked to the threshing-floor.
Then came a time of such joy supreme
As never had been in thought or dream.
For when they looked on the clean-threshed wheat,
And heard the threshers their tale repeat,
And knew that He had this wonder done,
They knelt and worshipped Him, every one!
Oh, think how happy they were and blest,
Who might awhile in His presence rest!
Think what it would be for you or me
That voice to hear and that face to see!
The children run to Him where He stands,
And cling with their little sunbrowned hands
To His garment; and the parents feel
Their burden lightened while yet they kneel.
"Thank God, who spared us!" the agèd say,
"To look on Thy blessèd face to-day!"
The sick are healed, and the weak made strong,
And hearts consoled that had suffered long:

Digitized by Google

A sound of gladness, of praise and prayer,
Floats far away on the summer air.

Amid such transports of young and old,
How was it that one could still be cold?
A certain widow whom all confessed
To be the bravest, perhaps the best,
Among the women the place contained —
Why was it that she aloof remained?

Handsome and stately, and strong of arm
To guard her fatherless babes from harm,
With five little hungry mouths to fill;
For them she laboured with might and will!
But, proud of spirit, she could not bear
That other hearts should her burden share.
Of soul too high for an evil deed,
She scorned the others, but helped their need.
In wit and wisdom the rest excelled,
And yet their kindness too oft repelled;
Accepted nothing, though free to give,
And almost rather had ceased to live
Than share the loaf from a neighbour's shelf.
Yes, proud of her very pride itself!

Digitized by Google

She nursed it, cherished it, thought it grand,
To guide unaided her house and land,
And thanked the Lord, when she knelt to pray,
That never one in the place could say,
"I help the widow!" And now she stood
Apart from the kneeling multitude,
And half impatient and half amused,
She smiled at the simple words they used,
Of praise and wonder, and thought how she
Could never so weak and childish be!

For her 't was a proud and happy day,
For rest and plenty before her lay:
Herself had sown and herself had reaped;
And now the beautiful sheaves lay heaped,
Not far away, by her open door;
Her heart rejoiced in the ample store!
A neighbour saw her, and called her name:
"Come near! perhaps He will do the same
For thee, and thy summer's work complete;
I know that thou hast not threshed thy wheat!"

She tossed her head with a smile of pride:
"I never yet, since my husband died,

Digitized by Google

Asked help or favour of any one!
Besides, I saw how the thing was done.
And I can do it as well as He;
He need not turn from His way for me!"
She looked on the awed, adoring crowd,
In scorn a moment; then laughed aloud,
To see the horror among them spread,
At sound of the evil words she said.

Our Lord's disciples, though saints they were,
Had no good wishes that day for her!
Indeed, their patience was greatly tried
To see Him slighted and thrust aside.
One even whispered, "Hast Thou not heard?"
But He said never an angry word!
One look of pity He on her cast,
Then turned, and forth from the village passed,
Along the lane where the grass was brown,
And birds were plucking the thistle-down,
Till under the olives' silver screen
He turned aside, and no more was seen.

And now the widow of heart so proud
Would show to the grave, indignant crowd

Digitized by Google

Her greater wisdom; with this intent
She calmly in to her fireside went;
Some coals she brought in an iron pan—
"If one can do it, another can!"
She said; and then with a careless smile
She touched the coals to her golden pile.

A flash, a crackle, a blinding blaze
Of flame, that struggles, and soars, and sways,
And sinks a moment, and soars again—
That was the end of the widow's grain!
A few short moments, and nought remained
Of all that her loving toil had gained
But blackened tinder, and embers red,
And the sullen smoke-cloud overhead!

Her friends and neighbours, I fear, meanwhile
Were far less minded to weep than smile;
And hardly one was with pity moved,
For the woman was not greatly loved.
And all were angry, as well as grieved,
To think of the slight our Lord received,
After His wonderful goodness shown,
And when He had made their cares His own!

Digitized by Google

The boys were ready to dance and shout,
At seeing the red sparks blown about;
The maidens whispered and laughed aside;
Their parents talked on the sin of pride.
To help or comfort her, no one planned,
Except the poorest of all the band;
An agèd woman, who near her came,
And drew her back from the scorching flame.
"Poor soul!" she said, "thou hast children five!
And I have none in the world alive.
Keep up thy heart! I am well content
To share with thee what the Lord has sent.
I just have gathered my harvest store,
And when 't is gone, He will send us more!"

In vain they spoke to her, ill or good;
She neither listened nor understood.
She minded not if they frowned or smiled;
Her face was white, and her eyes were wild,
As, lost in horror, she stood and gazed
To see the corn by her labour raised,
Their store of food for the coming year,
Consume before her and disappear!

Digitized by Google

Then came the cry of a little child,
From sleep awakened, in terror wild.
That cry brought life to her fainting heart;
She turned around with a sudden start,
And said, in a husky voice and low,
"Which way did that Blessèd Stranger go?"

A storm of voices around her rose;
The woman's purpose they all oppose.
"*Which way?*" they angrily say; "but how?
Wilt thou have courage to seek him now?
And after thy shameful words to-day,
Is He to stop for thee on His way?
Is He to come when He hears thy call?
But, woman, hast thou no shame at all?"
"Nay, go not near Him!" another said:
"That man has power to strike thee dead,
And thou hast angered Him! Let Him go—
Thy pride has ruined thee; be it so!"

Though none to help her a hand would lend,
That gray-haired woman was still her friend;
She could not speak, for her voice was drowned
In such a tumult of angry sound.

Digitized by Google

She only made with her wrinkled hand
A sign the widow could understand,
And quick as thought, and before they knew,
Away on her wild pursuit she flew.

Our Blesséd Lord, with His followers few,
Had journeyed on for a mile or two,
When, on the brow of a rocky hill,
The others noticed that He stood still
And looked behind Him; they did the same.
A woman running toward them came,
Running and stumbling, and falling oft,
And throwing wildly her arms aloft,
As if entreating them still to stay
Till she could finish the toilsome way!
They looked; and pity their souls possessed
At first in seeing her thus distressed;
But when they knew her, their hearts grew hard,
Nor would they longer her prayers regard.
"Good Lord, that woman it is," they say,
"Who scorned and slighted Thee so to-day.
She knows her folly, perhaps, too late;
For her, most surely, we should not wait!"

Digitized by Google

"She needs me now!" was His sole reply;
And still He waited — they wondered why!

Down in the dust at His feet she fell:
Her doleful story she could not tell,
For speech had failed, and she vainly tried:
But, stretching her helpless hands, she cried
(With lips that hardly the words could form,
They trembled so with the inward storm),
"Good Lord, have patience, and pity take
On me, for the innocent children's sake!"
And then from her eyes began to pour
A flood of tears, and she said no more.
She dropped her head on her heaving breast;
But He in His wisdom knew the rest.
And when He looked on her, bowed and crushed,
Her pride all broken, her boasting hushed,
"Take heart!" He said: "I will give thee more
And better grain than thou hadst before."

The day was drawing toward a close,
The sky was clear in its deep repose;

Digitized by Google

The sun, just sinking away from sight,
Had touched with a solemn crimson light
The smoky column that, dark and thin,
Still rose where the widow's sheaves had been.
The neighbours lingered, or came and went
To look, and talk of the day's event.
And, smiling grimly the wreck to view,
Some said: "The widow has had her due!"
But more of them shook their heads and sighed,
To think of the bitter fruits of pride.
And one old woman looked down the lane,
And wished the widow would come again!
The five poor little ones sat forlorn,
Beside the blackened and wasted corn;
And ate the bread that the neighbours brought:
For them, at least, there was pitying thought.
No sin of theirs, if the corn was burned!
And then it was that the Lord returned.

Returned, as ever, to save and bless!
And while the people around Him press,

Digitized by Google

The widow kneels and the children weep,
He lays His hand on the smouldering heap.
His touch has the evil work undone;
And in the light of the setting sun
The corn returned where the ashes lay;
But not as it was at noon that day.
To twice their size had the kernels grown,
And each with a burning lustre shone.
For, since that grain through the fire has passed,
'T will bear its colour until the last!

A few, in seeing the store increased
Of her who seemed to deserve it least,
Began to murmur; and yet, maybe,
Themselves were more in the wrong than she!
With all her folly, with all her sin —
For all her ignorant pride had been
Far more, alas, than her reason strong, —
She never did Him that grievous wrong
Of thinking He could refuse the prayer
Of one who sought Him in her despair;
Or that her sin, were it twice as great,
Could close His heart to her woful state;

Digitized by Google

Or lie so heavily on her soul
But what His love could outweigh the whole!
But most rejoiced in the happy sight
Of evil conquered and wrong made right.

And so from ruin and wreck was born
The beautiful, flame-hued Indian corn!

Digitized by Google

The Eldest Daughter of the King

Digitized by Google

THE two stories of the Patriarch, St. John of Alexandria, which are especially interesting, as being without doubt true in all their principal facts, are taken from a short account of that wonderful man, written by St. Leontius, Bishop of Napolis, in Cyprus, who visited Alexandria after the Patriarch's death, and wrote in great part from the dictation of the Patriarch's servant, by name Zaccarias, himself a man of saintly character. The stories must have been written by St. Leontius not long after 620, when the Patriarch died.

Digitized by Google

The Eldest Daughter of the King

SAINT JOHN of Alexandria — blessèd name,
Recalling ever holy thought and deed!
O heart forever warm with heavenly flame!
O hand forever full for others' need!

Blessèd and blessing thousands! Since his day,
Twelve hundred years, and more, have come
and gone,
Their beauty dead, their glory passed away:
But in our loving thought he still lives on.

Of all who ever walked on earthly sod,
(Though many loved and saintly names there
be,)
I know not if another ever trod
More closely in his Master's steps than he!

To comfort all who suffer, — this alone
His soul desired; for this he prayed and strove
With heart unchanging; and for him were none
Too high for pity, nor too low for love.

Digitized by Google

And often was he rich, and often poor;
For God upon him had great wealth bestowed,
Which endless store of blessing did procure
To souls that fainted with their weary load.

Nor could he e'er from sorrow turn away,
Nor from a brother's need his hand withhold;
But when his all was spent, men used to say,
The good Lord gave him back a hundredfold.

Enough there was, and ever more to spare,
Though help abundant came at every call.
When prudent friends had prayed him to forbear,
He only said, "God has enough for all."

Till, for their souls' content, he told the truth,—
He being now a grey-haired agèd man,—
The holy vision that had blessed his youth,
And changed, of all his life, the course and plan.

"A boy I was, and in my father's home
I slept; 't was night, and I was all alone,
When to my side I felt a presence come;
A hand awakened me that touched my own.

Digitized by Google

"I saw the chamber all ablaze with light,
And there, before me, stood a lady fair,
With olive crowned, and clad in raiment bright,
Such as, I think, the saints in Heaven may wear.

"Hers was no earthly beauty, but a grace
Most sweet and solemn that no words can reach;
I looked awhile in her celestial face,
And then addressed her, but with timid speech:

"'Who art thou, O my lady, that dost bring
Such glory in the night?' Then answered she:
'I am the eldest daughter of the King,
And more than all my sisters, he loves me.

"'For me He left His glory: it was I
Who led Him on along the thorny road,
To suffer, and for others' sin to die;
For me He shared thy sorrow, bore thy load.

"'Take me for thy companion: I will be
Thy friend as I was His, and by the hand
Will lead thee where at evening thou shalt see
The emperor's face, and in his presence stand.'

Digitized by Google

"While yet the voice was sounding in my ear
The vision ceased; I saw the light no more:
The moon was shining through the window near,
And all the house was silent as before.

"And, waiting till I saw the dawn ascend,
I lay and mused upon this wondrous thing;
And tried, with my child's mind, to comprehend
Who was the eldest daughter of the King.

"I prayed, I pondered long in vain; until
A light from Heaven was on my spirit shed:
And not by wisdom, nor by earthly skill,
I knew the meaning of the words she said.

"When Christ our blessèd Lord to earth came down,
And gave His life for lost and thankless men,
And changed His glory for a thorny crown,
'T was Mercy led and did constrain Him then.

"Ah, woe to us, if Mercy had not been
His eldest daughter, and His guide that day!
Then had we died, and perished in our sin,
Unpitied, unforgiven, cast away."

Digitized by Google

Such was the Patriarch's story, and we know
That Mercy in his heart her dwelling made,
As in no other; and his life below
Was Mercy, in a thousand forms displayed.

And when the summons came that comes to all,
As on a journey distant far he went;
While he, rejoicing, heard the heavenly call,
This token to the stricken church was sent.

A humble convent had his bounty shared,
From Alexandria some few miles away;
And there, where he for rest had oft repaired,
An agèd brother sick and dying lay.

For years infirm and helpless had he lain,
But strong in faith, and happy in God's will,
Through all the weary days and nights of pain,
His only work to suffer and lie still.

They two were friends, the Patriarch and he,
For oft the busy saint had loved to turn
From care and work, that peaceful face to see,
And from those patient lips some lesson learn.

Digitized by Google

And now as he lay dying, glad to go,
Yet thinking, maybe, of his absent friend,
To him was granted in a dream to know,
Of that most holy life, the blessèd end.

For, sleeping, he beheld in vision clear
That sombre palace by the poor beloved,
Where the good Patriarch, year after year,
Had all their burdens lightened or removed.

And down the stairway moved a long array
Of priests and others; slowly did they tread,
A grave procession, as on festal day,
And he, the Patriarch, was at their head.

The loved companions of his toil were there,
Who helped him long to labour and endure,
Who knelt beside him in the church at prayer,
Or bore his secret bounty to the poor.

They passed the door where none had knocked
in vain,
They crossed the courtyard with its well of stone;
But at the outer gate did all remain
With saddened look. while he went forth alone.

Digitized by Google

And now the vision changed, he walked no more
The city street that knew his step so well,
But trod a pleasant path, unknown before,
Through a fair land, where peace did ever dwell.

There rose the emperor's palace on a hill,
O'erlooking all the country, where it lay
Spread out beneath it, beautiful and still,
In all the sweetness of an April day.

Grand was that mansion, stately to behold;
To tell its beauty words can ne'er begin, —
The thousand columns, and the domes of gold,
And shining all as from a light within.

He neared the palace — of their own accord
The lofty gates before him open swing,
And in the glory, as it outward poured,
Came forth the eldest daughter of the King.

Came as he saw her on that far-off night
Which star-like through his life's long journey shone,
Wearing her olive crown, her robe of light,
And came to meet him, where he walked alone.

Digitized by Google

He bowed and knelt before her, for he knew
That presence which had blessed him long before;
While from her folded mantle forth she drew
A crown of olive, like the one she wore,

And placed it on the saintly silvered head;
Then took his hand. He rose; nor did they wait:
The dreamer watched them as they onward sped,
Till, hand in hand, they entered through the gate.

And then, as light concealed them, he awoke,
And to the brethren, gathered in his cell,
In tearful silence listening while he spoke,
He did the story of his vision tell,

And bade them note what hour the dream was sent,
Which some with anxious hearts made haste to do;
Then waited, fearing what the vision meant;
Till time had shown them all they feared was true.

Digitized by Google

For when the dreaded tidings came at last,
They knew that on that very hour and day
Their much-loved father from this life had passed,
In his own isle of Cyprus, far away.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Bishop Troilus

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Bishop Troilus

THE MANSION IN HEAVEN

IN pomp and state, with following great, the
Bishop Troilus came
To the town of Alexandria, which knew him
long by fame,
To see the holy Patriarch, who had been his
friend of old,
To hear his words of wisdom, and his saintly
life behold.
In youth their paths together lay, and both with
one accord
Had chosen then the better part, and thought to
serve the Lord;
For half a century now and more had each one
gone his way.
The Patriarch nearer was to God, far nearer
than that day;
For his soul was like a garden where the flowers
that then were sown,
With care and patient tending, had to perfect
beauty grown.

Digitized by Google

And Troilus? . . . In the world's esteem he
stood as high, or higher;
His piety did all men praise, his eloquence
admire;
He had fiery words to thrill them, he had flowery
words to please,
And when he preached on festal days, the people
swarmed like bees;
From altar steps to open door there was hardly
room to stand.
And 't was not the sermon only, but his presence
was so grand;
With his grave and aged beauty, with his form
erect and tall,
With saintly face and silver hair, he won the
hearts of all.
When through the city he returned, so lofty and
serene,
A train of priests attended him, all with obsequi-
ous mien;
And children followed open-eyed, and gentle
ladies bent
From balcony and window high to see him as
he went.

Digitized by Google

Indeed he was a stately sight in silken raiment clad,
The ring he wore was valued more than aught the Patriarch had;
And the cross upon his bosom, that the people wondering viewed,
Gave back the sunshine, when he walked, from jewels many-hued.
And men said his life was blameless, but it still must be confessed,
Though the saints were glad to own him, yet the sinners loved him best.
He was rich, and he was famous, and, as all his life had shown,
He was great in worldly wisdom, and the world will love its own.

But while saints and sinners praised him, there was one who did not praise,
But whose eyes forever watched him with a sad and anxious gaze;
For the Patriarch, simple-hearted, was not dazzled like the rest,

Digitized by Google

And he knew the deadly passion that the Bishop's
soul possessed, —
Yes, more deadly than another, for it lay so still
and cold,
Like a serpent coiled within him, — 't was the
growing love of gold.

It had choked away his pleasure, it had eaten up
his peace,
As with every year that left him he had seen his
wealth increase,
Till his heart grew dry and withered in the
smoke of worldly care;
But it dulled him with its poison, and he knew
not it was there.
Oh, the Patriarch longed to see him from such
cruel bondage free,
And he pleaded hard for Troilus every night on
bended knee;
For there yet was time to save him, so he hoped
and so believed,
But the days and weeks were passing, and no
answer he received.

Digitized by Google

But with praying he grew bolder, and to combat he began,
And he left his door one morning with a wise and hopeful plan;
And he said in solemn murmur, as he walked along the way,
"I must go and fight with Satan for my brother's soul to-day;
He is cruel, he is cunning, but his arts will be in vain,
The strongest net he ever wove will never bear the strain
Of seeing and of hearing what each day I hear and see,
And the Lord has saved my brother if he will but come with me."

It was in the early morning, long before the noise and heat,
And the life was just beginning in the shady city street,
When he saw a church door open, and he turned and entered in.
"I will ask the Lord to help me in this work that I begin."

Digitized by Google

There were some who entered near him, and he
saw they came in haste,
Toiling men and burdened women, who had
little time to waste;
But they stole some precious minutes in that
church to kneel and pray,
To refresh their souls and cheer them for the
labours of the day;
And they gathered close around him on the pave-
ment, for they felt
That their prayers would rise the higher if their
father with them knelt.
Then he said to them: "My children, you must
help me now indeed,
For my heart and soul are troubled for a friend
in sorest need;
He is low with mortal sickness, but no earthly
skill can cure.
Pray the Lord to show His mercy to the poorest
of the poor."
So they knelt and prayed together, till the morn-
ing sun was high,
For the Patriarch's heart was kindled, and the
time went quickly by.

Digitized by Google

Troilus too had risen early, and had said his
morning prayers,
But he said them somewhat coldly, being filled
with other cares.
At that moment he was thinking, while he
counted up his store,
Upon certain silver goblets he had seen the day
before,
Which a silversmith had brought him, and had
hoped that he would buy.
They were nobly wrought and chiselled, and the
price indeed was high,
But he thought upon his table they would look
exceeding fine
When his friends, the rich and noble, should
come in with him to dine;
Then how all of them would envy, and this
thought his spirit cheered, —
When a gentle knock aroused him, and the
Patriarch appeared.
Very bright his eyes were shining, and his face
was all aglow,
But his voice was strange and solemn, when he
told him, "I must go

Digitized by Google

To the hospital, my brother, and I came here on my way;
If we both could go together, it would be a happy day.
There I find my greatest blessing, every morning fresh and new,
But far greater, but far sweeter could I share it once with you."
How the heart of Troilus softened, as those eyes upon him shone,
At their look of earnest pleading, at the tremor in the tone!
Strange it was that look could melt him and that voice could change him so,
Calling back to life, a moment, what had withered long ago, —
Some old good that stirred within him, often spurned and thrust aside.
But the flowers the Lord had planted, though they dwindled, had not died;
He was poor in heavenly treasure, but he loved the Patriarch still.
"I will come," he answered quickly; "you may lead me where you will."

Digitized by Google

There were looks and tones of wonder in the hospital that day,
From the rows of low white couches where the sick and dying lay,
As, with all his train about him, in his splendour and his pride,
On he walked, the Bishop Troilus, by the simple Patriarch's side.
But erelong the two were parted, for as Troilus looked around,
He recoiled in shrinking horror from each doleful sight and sound;
While the Patriarch loved to linger for a while by every bed,
With his strong arms ever ready to sustain a drooping head;
Happy in each humble service, and forgetting all his state,
While he thanked the Lord who sent him on these stricken ones to wait.
How the pale sad faces brightened into smiles as he drew near,
And what loving words were murmured, faintly murmured in his ear!

Digitized by Google

"Does he well," said Bishop Troilus, as he saw
him turn and go
From one bedside to another, "does he well to
stoop so low?"
Yet had Troilus only known it, they were not
the poor alone
Whom his brother served that morning, but their
Master and his own.
There was one but just recovered, light of heart,
though poor and weak,
With a journey long before him, going forth his
home to seek,
Far away among the mountains where his wife
and children stayed;
But the Patriarch's love had found him ere the
stranger sought his aid,
Giving money for the journey, giving blessèd
words of cheer.
Then he turned, for time was pressing, and a
sadder face lay near,
Worn by months of pain and languor; he was
young, had once been strong,
He was fading now, but slowly, and perhaps
would suffer long,

Digitized by Google

And the hundred wants of sickness who can
know that has not proved?
He had wearied all about him, but the Patriarch's
heart was moved;
So he heard the long complaining to which no
one else gave heed,
Then he left him, soothed and peaceful, with
enough for all his need.
So with one and with another for a moment he
would stay,
At each bed he left a blessing, and a blessing
brought away,
Till his purse grew light and empty, as had hap-
pened oft before;
Though he turned it up and shook it, there was
not one penny more.

Then he turned and sought for Troilus, who that
moment, as it chanced,
With a look subdued and solemn, stood and
gazed, like one entranced,
On the strange, unearthly beauty, on the light of
perfect peace
In a woman's face before him; she was nearing
her release,

Digitized by Google

And a glory rested on her from the opening door above;
Yet one shadow marred its splendour when she looked with anxious love
On a little maid, her daughter, with a pretty, careworn face,
Who had brought two younger children, waiting now for her embrace,
Wondering why she did not give it, why so deadly still she lay,
For they knew not, though she knew it, she would not live out the day.
Said the Patriarch: "Brother Troilus, have you nothing you could give
To this woman and her children, for she has not long to live?
And I see her mind is troubled, and I think, before they part,
Had she something she could leave them, it would ease her burdened heart;
For myself, I freely promise I will make these babes my care,
But to-day my purse is empty, so I pray you not to spare."

Digitized by Google

Oh! alas, poor Bishop Troilus! how this pleading broke the spell
That the woman's look had woven, and how low his spirit fell!
For he dearly loved his money, with a passion deep and blind,
As a scholar loves his learning, or a saint his peace of mind.
But the eyes of all were on him at that moment, and he knew
'T was in hopeful expectation of what such a saint would do;
There were many who had entered from the busy street to gaze,
He would not be shamed before them, they should still have cause to praise;
But his purse would have to open, so he turned and waved his hand
To the priest who always bore it, with a gesture of command.
"For this woman for her daughter and the two poor babes," said he,
"Lay down thirty golden pieces in the Patriarch's hand for me."

Digitized by Google

There were none who had not heard him, for his voice was loud and clear,
And a low, admiring murmur rose from all the couches near,
While the Patriarch stood rejoicing in the deed his friend had done;
By himself he judged another, and he thought the victory won.
For one moment Bishop Troilus feels his narrow heart expand,
When the maiden thanks him weeping, and the children kiss his hand,
And the mother, just departing, from the pillow where she lies,
Turns one happy smile upon him, with a blessing in her eyes.

But alas! on home returning, when the sacrifice was made,
When the Patriarch's holy presence was no longer there to aid,
He did much bewail his money; half in anger, half in pain,
To have parted in a moment with what took so long to gain.

Digitized by Google

And his heart was in a turmoil, and a pain was
in his head,
Till the raging turned to fever, and he threw him
on his bed
In a storm of angry passion that no reason could
control;
For to him to part with money was like parting
with his soul.
But he said no word to any of this rage and in-
ward strife,
And the priests who waited on him were in ter-
ror for his life,
And as nothing made him better, they took
counsel, and agreed
That the Patriarch, and he only, was the man
to meet their need;
So they sent and humbly prayed him if to come
he would be pleased,
For his friend the Bishop Troilus was with sud-
den illness seized.

In his chamber lay the Bishop, sick in body, sick
in mind;
But the Patriarch, wise in spirit, had his malady
divined.

Digitized by Google

So he came and sat beside him, patient still, but pale with grief,
While he made one last endeavour for that troubled soul's relief.
But his friend was sore and angry, and his words he would not hear,
For the presence now disturbed him that had lately been so dear.
And he lay with face averted, till he heard the Patriarch say,
"I have brought you back the money that you gave away to-day."
Then indeed he started wildly, and his eyes he opened wide,
And he turned and faced his brother with a joy he could not hide;
For with sudden hope he trembled, and it paled his fevered cheek;
And the Patriarch's heart was sinking, but he still went on to speak:
"When I asked your help this morning, I had nothing of my own,
So I left to you the blessing which had else been mine alone;

Digitized by Google

For those three dear orphan children I had gladly
done the whole,
So their mother up in heaven might be praying
for my soul.
And I now have come to ask you if this grace
you will resign, —
Will you take again the money, and let your good
deed be mine?
Yet I pray you to consider, ere you grant it or
refuse,
What a great and heavenly treasure I shall win
and you will lose;
For indeed I would not wrong you, though to me
the gain be great.
So then do not answer rashly, — there is time,
we both can wait,
And 't were well to think a little on the words
our Master said,
How He left the poor behind, that we might
serve them in His stead;
And whatever help we grant them, be it great or
be it small,
To our blessèd Lord we give it, to our Lord, who
gave us all."

Digitized by Google

Then made answer Bishop Troilus, "As for
what you now propose,
If it please you I am ready, and the bargain we
can close.
There are many kinds of service, and each need-
ful in its way,
And I think the Lord has set me in His church
to preach and pray,
And to save the souls that perish, and to teach
men how to live,
While your own vocation, brother, is with open
hand to give.
Let not one defraud the other, take your part and
leave me mine,
For howe'er we may divide it, all the service is
divine.
Let us feed God's flock together, for His needy
children care,
I the souls, and you the bodies, so the burden we
may share."
"Then so be it," said the other, but his voice
was low and grave,
And he prayed to God in silence for the soul he
could not save.

Digitized by Google

"We must write it all in order, we must sign
and seal it too,
So that mine may be the blessing, while the gold
remains with you."

So they wrote a contract solemn, to which each
one signed his name,
In which he, the Bishop Troilus, did relinquish
every claim
To whate'er reward or merit his one pious deed
had earned,
Since the thirty golden pieces to his hand had
been returned.
Then the Patriarch counted slowly all the pieces,
one by one,
In the open hand of Troilus, and his last attempt
was done.
All had failed, and heavy-hearted from that cham-
ber forth he went,
While his friend lay still and smiling in the full-
ness of content;
For the fever now had left him, and 't was sweet
to lie and rest,
With no more a thorn to vex him in his smooth,
untroubled breast.

Digitized by Google

With a dreamy satisfaction he was thinking all the while
How those pretty shining pieces would increase the golden pile
In that chest of hoarded treasure that already held so much;
And he laid his hand upon them with a fond caressing touch.
But his thoughts began to wander, and his eyes were closing soon,
In the drowsy heat and stillness of the summer afternoon.

Then a dream was sent to bless him, as in quiet sleep he lay,
And it bore him in a vision to the country far away;
And he saw the holy city, where the saints and angels dwell;
Of its glory, of its beauty, mortal tongue can never tell.
There were palm-trees growing stately by the water, crystal clear;
There was music ever swelling, sometimes far and sometimes near,

Digitized by Google

As it rose in mystic cadence from the hearts that overflowed
With the joy that reigns forever in their beautiful abode.
And the people of that city whom he met along the way
On the shining golden pavement, oh, how full of peace were they!
For he thought some heavenly vision shone forever in their sight,
And he looked where they were gazing, but he only saw the light
As it flooded all with glory, and the air it seemed to fill;
But he saw not what they looked on, for his eyes were mortal still.
Now among those lighted faces there were some he knew before,
Of the poor to whom so often he had closed his heart and door;
Such as in the heavenly city he had little thought to find,
For the sad and sick and needy had been never to his mind:

Digitized by Google

Of the rich were not so many, yet a few of these
beside,
Who by deeds of love and mercy had their
Master glorified.
And in perfect health and beauty, among all that
bright array,
Was the woman he saw dying in the hospital
that day.

All along the road he travelled, to the left and to
the right,
Rose the palaces they dwelt in, each a mansion
of delight,
But all varying in their beauty, far away as eye
could reach,
With a name in golden letters, high above the
door of each.
And sweet faces smiled upon him, from the win-
dows here and there,
Gentle faces free forever from the shade of earthly
care;
And he heard the happy voices of the children
as they played

Digitized by Google

In the fair and peaceful gardens, where the roses never fade;
And the things he left behind him seemed so very poor and small,
That he wondered, in that glory, why men cared for them at all.

But oh, wonder of all wonders, when he saw a name that shone
O'er a high and arching doorway, yes, a name that was his own!
Could it be his eyes deceived him? No, he read it o'er and o'er;
"This," it said, "of Bishop Troilus is the home forevermore."
Oh the beauty of that palace, with such light and splendour filled,
That he thought the clouds of sunset had been hewn its walls to gild;
And the golden door stood open, he could catch a glimpse within
Of the vast illumined chambers where no foot had ever been.

Digitized by Google

He could only gaze bewildered, for the wonder
was too great,
And the joy so poured upon him he could hardly
bear the weight.
Then he took one step toward it, but a servant
of the King
Who from far-off earth that morning had re-
turned on busy wing,
And was bearing gifts and tokens from the scat-
tered church below,
Came and passed and stood before him, in the
courtyard's golden glow.

Then he turned to his companions, for a few had
gathered near,
And his words fell hard and heavy on the Bishop's
listening ear, —
"We must cancel that inscription from the stone,
and write thereon
That Troilus hath this palace sold unto the
Patriarch John,
And that thirty golden pieces were the price that
he received."

Digitized by Google

Up then started Bishop Troilus, for his soul was sorely grieved,
And he tried to speak, but could not, and awoke in his dismay,
With his hand upon the money close beside him where he lay.

Now the long bright day was over; as he saw the sun descend,—
"Weary day," the Patriarch thought it; he was glad to see it end.
He was walking in his garden where the freshening shadows lay,
And the flowers that drooped at noontime stood erect in beauty gay;
But their brightness could not cheer him, and he bent his head and sighed,
For he thought, with wondering sadness, that the Lord his prayer denied.

Then he heard a step behind him, and he looked; but who was there,
Wild of look, like one who struggled with a pain he could not bear?

Digitized by Google

Could it be the stately Bishop? Yes, but oh, how changed to see!
And he said with tears and trembling, "O my brother, pray for me!"
How the Patriarch's heart rebounded from the weight that on it pressed,
At the change so deep and sudden, in those broken words expressed!
How his cheek grew red with gladness, how it smoothed his troubled brow!
"God forgive me if I doubted, all my prayers are answered now."

"Come," he said, "my brother Troilus, sit beside me, tell me all;"
And he led him, pale and helpless, to a seat beside the wall.
And there Troilus, clinging closely to that strong and helpful hand,
Trusting in the heart that loved him and his thoughts could understand,
Told the story of his vision to his awed and listening friend, —
All that dream of light and glory, with its sad, unlooked-for end:

Digitized by Google

But his voice, which trembled ever, wellnigh
failed him when he told
Of the horror of that waking, with his hand
upon the gold;
When his eyes, long blind, were opened, and he
saw the wreck within,
And one fearful moment showed him what his
wasted life had been.
"Now," he said, "my courage fails me when I
think to mend my ways.
I have wasted all God gave me, — mind, and
strength, and length of days, —
And the gold I gave my soul for pulls me down-
ward with its weight;
Help me if you can, oh, help me! Say it is not
yet too late."
And he looked with eyes beseeching at the
Patriarch, who replied
With a smile that fell like sunshine on the faint
heart by his side, —

"What! too late for God's forgiveness, when He
calls you to repent?
'T was to save you, not to lose you, that the
blessèd dream was sent;

Digitized by Google

'T is His help, not mine, my brother, you are needing, and you know,
If we ask it, He will give it, for Himself has told us so.
And the prodigal returning shall be welcomed all the more
If the years were long and many since he left his Father's door."
"But," said Troilus, "I am agèd, and my manhood's strength is past;
After such a life ungodly, can I hope for grace at last?"
"Never fear," the Patriarch answered, "there is joy in heaven to-day,
And they ask not in their gladness if your hair be black or gray."

So then Troilus gathered courage, and that night, by deed and word,
Gave himself and all his substance to the service of the Lord;
Yet in his own strength mistrusting, he implored his friend anew
With his daily prayer to aid him, and he promised so to do.

Digitized by Google

And the thirty golden pieces he returned to him again,
Yes, and other thirty with them, for the change was not in vain.

Then he left the past behind him, and a better life began;
From that evening in the garden he became another man.
There was no more train about him when he walked the city through,
For the priests who once attended now had better work to do;
And the ladies cared no longer from their balconies to lean,
When of worldly pomp and splendour there was nothing to be seen.
For the cross of many jewels on his bosom shone no more,
Having gone on works of mercy to increase his heavenly store.
But the poor and needy sought him; he was now their faithful friend,
And they knew, whate'er befell them, on his love they might depend.

Digitized by Google

So his closing days were happy, after years of sordid care,
For no gain can bring contentment till the poor have had their share;
And he lightened many a burden, and he righted many a wrong,
And the wealth became a blessing that had been a curse so long;
And his secret hoard was scattered, and men said that he died poor,
But he found great wealth in heaven at the end, we may be sure.

Digitized by Google

The Crosses on the Wall

Digitized by Google

THIS beautiful legend has for me a most peculiar interest, owing to the circumstances under which I first heard it. It was taught to me by a very dear young friend whom I had known and loved from his infancy, — Piero, the only surviving child of Count Giuseppe Pasolini Zanelli of Faenza. It was only last October — eight months ago — and we were all staying together in the home of his beloved and still beautiful grandmother, at Bassano, in the Veneto. It was the last evening that we expected to pass together, and Pierino (we had never been able to give up calling him by that childish diminutive) brought a book with him, a collection of popular legends compiled by De Gubernatis, and said that he had a story to read us. It was "The Crosses on the Wall," and it has always seemed to me as though he read it on that particular evening to prepare us for what was to come. For some months he had been not quite so strong as usual, yet no one felt any particular apprehension, until on the twenty-eighth of November he died, almost without warning. He was twenty-two years old, of a very beautiful character, — so good that we ought to have known he was not for us.

With him two great and ancient families come to an end, — the Pasolini-Zanelli of Faenza, and the Baroni-Semitecolo of Bassano: these last are the only descendants of that Semitecolo who worked in mosaic at Torcello.

Digitized by Google

The Crosses on the Wall
A Legend of Primiero

COME, children, listen to what I tell,
For my words are wise to-day:
From Primiero among the hills
Was the legend brought away.

And Primiero among the hills
Is a little world apart,
Where is much to love and much to learn,
If you have a willing heart.

It lies on high, like a stranded ship,
From the parted wave of time;
Not far from the troubled world we know,
But the way is hard to climb.

For the mountains rise and close it in,
With their walls of green and gray;
With crag and forest and smooth-worn cliff,
Where the clouds alone can stray.

Digitized by Google

And when a house they have builded there,
If a blessing they would win,
Above the door do they write a prayer,
That Christ may dwell therein.

And I think, throughout the ancient town,
On its steep ascending road,
In many a heart, in many a home,
Has He taken His abode.

And when a burden is hard to bear —
And such burdens come to all —
They tell the story I'm telling now,
Of the crosses on the wall.

'T is a pearl of wisdom, gathered far
In the dim and distant past;
But ever needed, but ever new,
As long as the world shall last.

For never has been since earth was made,
And surely shall never be,
A man so happy or wise or great,
He might from the cross be free.

Digitized by Google

The tale it is of a widow poor,
And by trouble sorely pressed;
Of how, through sorrow and many tears,
At the end her soul was blest.

She had not been always poor and sad,
For her early years were bright,
With a happy home, and with parents kind,
And herself their hearts' delight!

A mother's darling, a father's pride,
She was fair in form and face;
A sunny creature, a joy to all,
For her sweet and winning grace.

Then, early married to one she loved,
She had still been shielded well;
For her he laboured, for her he thought,
And on her no burden fell.

She worked, indeed; but what work was hers
Through the short and happy hours?
To pluck the fruit from her orchard trees,
Or to tend the garden flowers;

Digitized by Google

To sit and spin, and to sing the while
In her porch with roses gay;
To spread the table with plenty piled,
And to watch the children play.

Their home was a little nest of peace;
'T was a mile beyond the town,
In that sheltered valley, green with woods,
Where the river murmurs down.

And she never dreamed of change to come,
(Though a change must all expect,)
Till the blow, like lightning, on her fell,
And her happy life was wrecked.

But who could have thought the man would die?
There were few so strong as he!
From his forest work they bore him home,
Struck dead by a falling tree.

A petted child, and a wife beloved,
She had hardly sorrow known,
Till the strong, brave man was borne away,
And she faced the world alone.

Digitized by Google

Alone, with a babe too young to speak,
And with other children five:
"Oh, why," she asked, "are the strong removed
And the feeble left alive?"

But where is the good of asking *why*,
When our helpers disappear?
That question never was answered yet,
And it never will be, here.

There was little time to sit and weep;
She must rise, and bear the strain;
Alone she stood, with the home to keep,
And the children's bread to gain.

The best of herself had gone with him;
She had no more faith nor trust:
She could not bow to the Lord's decree,
For she felt it all unjust.

The good Lord cares for a widow's need,
But on Him she did not call.
She laboured hard, and she fought with fate,
And they lived — but that was all.

Digitized by Google

She fought her battle with fate, and failed,
As many have failed before;
If against the thorns we push and press,
They will only prick the more.

She could not bear with the children now,
And she called them rude and wild;
Forgetting quite, in her sullen grief,
That she had been once a child.

Yes, wild they were; and like all wild things
They were light and swift and strong;
And her poor, sick spirit turned away
From the gay, unruly throng.

They swam the river, they climbed the trees,
They were full of life and play;
But oft, when their mother's voice they heard,
They hid from her sight away.

They did not love her, and that she knew,
And of that she oft complained;
But not by threats nor by angry words
Could the children's love be gained.

Digitized by Google

Respect and honour we may command;
They will come at duty's call:
But love, the beautiful thornless rose,
Grows wild, when it grows at all.

And she grew bitter, as time went on,
Grew bitter and hard and sore,
Till one day she cried in her despair,
"I can bear my life no more!

"Look down from Heaven, good Lord, and see
And pity my cruel fate!
Oh, come, and in mercy take away
My burden, for 't is too great!

"My heart is breaking with all its load,
And I feel my life decline;
Never I think did the woman live
Who has borne a cross like mine!"

To her cry for help an answer came,
And solemn it was, and strange!
For a silence deep around her fell,
And the place seemed all to change.

Digitized by Google

THE CROSSES ON THE WALL

She stood in a sad and sombre room,
Where from ceiling down to floor,
Along the wall and on every side,
There were crosses — nothing more.

There were crosses old, and crosses new,
There were crosses large and small;
And in their midst there was One who stood
As the Master of them all.

Before His presence her eyes dropped low,
And her wild complaining died;
For she knew the cross that He had borne
Was greater than all beside.

And He bade her choose, and take away,
From among the many there,
Another cross, in exchange for hers,
That she found too great to bear.

She looked for those that were least in size,
And she quickly lifted one;
But oh, 't was heavy, and pained her more
Than her own had ever done!

Digitized by Google

She laid it back with a trembling hand —
"And whose cross is that?" she cried;
"For heavier 't is than even mine!"
And a solemn voice replied:

"That cross belongs to a maiden young,
But of youth she little knows;
For the days to her are days of pain,
And the night brings scant repose.

"A helpless, suffering, useless thing!
And her pain will never cease,
Till death in pity will come one day,
And her troubles end in peace.

"She never has walked the pleasant fields,
Nor has sat beneath the trees;
The hospital wall that shuts her in
Is the only world she sees.

"She has no mother, she has no home,
And in strangers' hands she lies;
With none to care for her while she lives,
Nor weep for her when she dies."

Digitized by Google

"But why is the cross so small, my Lord,
And why does her heart not break?"
"She counts it little," the answer came,
"For she bears it for my sake."

The widow blushed with a sudden shame;
To her eyes the tears arose:
She dried them soon, and again she turned,
And another cross she chose.

It fell from her hand against the wall,
And she let it there remain:
"That cross shall never be mine," she said,
"Though I take my own again!

"And whose is this that I cannot hold?
For it seems to burn my hand!
And never, I think, was heart so strong
That could such a weight withstand."

"The cross it is of a gentle wife,
And she wears it all unseen;
With early sorrow her hair is white,
But she keeps a smile serene.

Digitized by Google

"She gave her heart to an evil man,
And she thought him good and true;
And long she trusted and long believed,
But at last the truth she knew.

"She knows that his soul is stained with crime,
But the worst she still conceals;
Abuse and terror her sole reward,
And the Lord knows what she feels!

"She cannot leave him, for love dies hard,
And her children bear his name;
But she prays for grace, to keep and guard
Their innocent lives from shame.

"She trembles oft when his step she hears
On a lonely winter night;
And she hides her frightened babes afar
From their cruel father's sight.

"And she dares not even hope for death,
Though his hand might set her free:
'T were well for her in the grave to rest;
But where would the children be?"

Digitized by Google

The widow shuddered, her face grew pale,
And she no more turned to look:
She reached her hand to the wall near by,
And a cross by chance she took.

'T was not so large as the first had been,
But it seemed a fearful weight!
"And whose am I holding now?" she asked,
For it did not look so great.

"A mother's cross is the one you bear,"
So the voice in answer said,
"And she once had children six like you;
But her children all are dead.

"She has all besides that earth can give;
She has friends and wealth to spare,
And house and land — but she counts them not,
For the children are not there.

"Time passes slowly, and she grows old;
But she may not yet depart.
In lonely splendour she counts the years,
With an empty, hungry heart.

Digitized by Google

"And she knows by whom the cross was sent,
And she tries her head to bow;
But six green mounds by the churchyard wall
Are the most she cares for now."

The widow thought of her own wild brood,
And she felt a creeping chill:
And, "Oh, give me back my cross!" she said,
"I will keep and bear it still.

"Forgive me, Lord" (and with that she knelt,
And for very shame she wept).
"I know my sin, that I could not bow,
Nor Thy holy will accept.

"Oh, give me patience, for life is hard;
And the daily strength I need!
And by Thy grace I will try to bear
The burden for me decreed.

"I'll change my ways with the children now,
Though they give me added cares.
Poor babes! I know, if they love me not,
That the blame is mine, not theirs!"

Digitized by Google

She kept her word as the weeks went on,
And she fought with fate no more:
'T was now with a patient, humble heart
That her daily cross she bore.

The children wondered to see her change
So greatly in look and speech!
She met them now with a smile so kind,
And a gentle word for each.

And soon they learned, from her altered ways,
What her words had vainly taught;
Their love, that long she had claimed in vain,
Came back to her all unsought.

There were merry shouts and dancing feet,
When the mother came in sight;
There were little arms around her thrown,
There were eyes with joy alight.

With love for teacher, they learned to help,
There was work for fingers small:
Her heart grew soft like the earth in spring,
And she thanked the Lord for all!

Digitized by Google

Her girls so pretty, her boys so brave,
And so helpful all and kind!
She wondered often, and thought with shame
Of how she had once repined.

For in their presence she oft forgot
Her burden of want and care,
Forgot her trouble — forgot, almost,
That she had a cross to bear!

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Suora Marianna

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Suora Marianna

LITTLE children, will you listen to a simple
tale of mine,
That I learned at San Marcello, in the Tuscan
Apennine,
From an aged, saintly woman, gone to heaven
long ago?
It has helped me on my journey, and as yet you
cannot know
Half the wisdom stored within it, nor the com-
fort it can give;
But still, try and not forget it! You will need it
if you live,
And some day, when life is waning and your
hands begin to tire,
You will think of Marianna, and her vision by
the fire.

In a convent, old and quiet, near a little country
town,
On a chestnut-shaded hillside, to the river sloping
down,
Dwelt a few of those good sisters who go out
among the poor,

Digitized by Google

Who must labour late and early, and much
weariness endure;
And the one who did in patience and in all good
works excel
Was the Sister Marianna, she whose story now
I tell.

She was ever kind and willing, for each heavy
task prepared:
No one ever thought to spare her, and herself
she never spared.
All unpraised and all unnoticed, bearing burdens
not her own,
Yet she lived as rich and happy as a queen upon
her throne!

She was rich, though few would think it; for
God gave her grace to choose,
Not the world's deceitful riches, but the wealth
one cannot lose.
There are many heap up treasure, but it is not
every one
Who will take his treasure with him when his
earthly life is done.

Digitized by Google

Was she beautiful? I know not. She had eyes
of peaceful light,
And her face looked sweet and blooming in its
frame of linen white.
To the sick and heavy-hearted she was pleasant
to behold,
And she seemed a heavenly vision to the feeble
and the old.
She was happy when she wandered up the wan-
dering mountain road,
Bearing food and warmth and blessing to some
desolate abode,
Though the ice-cold winds were blowing and
her woman's strength was tried;
For she knew who walked there with her, in
her heart and by her side.
She was happy — oh, so happy! — in her little
whitewashed cell
Looking out among the branches, where they
gave her leave to dwell
In her scanty hours of leisure; for there, looking
from the wall,
Were the dear and holy faces that she loved the
best of all.

Digitized by Google

'T was an old and faded picture, poorly painted at the best,
Of Our Lord, the Holy Infant, in His Mother's arms at rest.
But her faith and loving fancy had a glory to it lent,
And the faces that she saw there were not what the artist meant.
And the wooden shelf before it she would oftentimes adorn
With the buttercup and bluebell, and the wild rose from the thorn,
Which she gathered, when returning, while the morning dew was bright,
From some home, remote and lonely, where she watched the sick by night.
So her life was full of sunshine, for in toiling for the Lord
She had found the hidden sweetness that in common things lies stored:
He has strewn the earth with flowers, and each eye their brightness sees;
But He filled their cups with honey, for His humble working bees.

Digitized by Google

But there came a time — poor sister! — when her
rosy cheek grew pale,
And her eyes, with all their sunlight, seemed to
smile as through a veil;
And her step was weak and heavy, as she trod
the steep ascent,
Where through weeks of wintry weather to her
loving work she went.
'T was a foot-path, lone and narrow, winding
up among the trees,
And 't was hard to trace in winter, when the
slippery ground would freeze,
And the snow fall thick above it, hiding every
sign and mark;
But she went that way so often she could climb
it in the dark!
'T was to nurse a poor young mother, by fierce
malady assailed,
That she made the daily journey, and she never
once had failed.
Now the short sharp days were over, and the
spring had just begun;
Every morn the light came sooner, and more
strength was in the sun.

Digitized by Google

All around the grass was springing, and its tender verdure spread,
Mid the empty burrs of chestnuts, and the old leaves, brown and dead,
Low and small, but creeping, creeping till it almost touched the edge
Of the daily lessening snow-drifts, under rock or thorny hedge.
From the wreck of last year's autumn life awakened, strong and new,
And the buds were crowding upward, though as yet the flowers were few.

Many nights had she been watching, and with little rest by day,
For her heart was in the chamber where that helpless woman lay;
There the flame of life she cherished, when it almost ceased to burn,
Praying God to help and keep them till the husband should return.

'T was the old and common story, such as all of us can hear,

Digitized by Google

If we care to, in the mountains, every day throughout the year!
She who languished, weak and wasting, in the garret chamber there,
Had been once as strong and happy as the wild birds in the air.
She had been a country beauty, for the boys to serenade;
And the poets sang about her, in the simple rhymes they made,
And with glowing words compared her to the lilies as they grew,
Or to stars, or budding roses, as their manner is to do.
Then the man who played at weddings with his ancient violin,
With his sad, impassioned singing, had contrived her heart to win;
And one brilliant April morning he had brought her home, a bride,
To his farm and low-built cottage on the mountain's terraced side.
'T was a poor, rough home to look at, and from neighbours far away,

Digitized by Google

But with love and health and music there was much to make it gay.
They were happy, careless people, and they thought not to complain,
Though the door were cracked and broken, or the roof let in the rain:
They could pile the fire with branches, while the winter storms swept by;
For the rest, their life was mostly out beneath the open sky.

Time had come, and brought its changes, — sunshine first, and then the shade,
Frost untimely, chestnuts blighted. Sickness came, and debts were made;
Fields were sold, alas, to pay them; yet their troubles did not cease,
And the poor man's heart was troubled thus to see his land decrease!
Fields were gone, and bread was wanting, for there now were children small;
Much he loved them, much he laboured — but he could not feed them all.

Digitized by Google

So he left them, heavy-hearted, and his fortune went to try
In the low Maremma country, where men gain or where they die,
With its soft and treacherous beauty, with its fever-laden air;
But as yet the fever spared him, and they hoped it yet would spare.
'T was a long and cruel winter in the home he left behind:
Lonely felt the house without him, and the young wife moped and pined:
Still her children's love sustained her, till this sickness laid her low;
When good Sister Marianna came to nurse her, as you know.

Week on week had hope been waning, as more feeble still she grew:
Marianna tried, but vainly, every simple cure she knew.
Then the doctor gave up hoping, and his long attendance ceased:

Digitized by Google

"I can do no more," he told her; "you had
better call the priest.
To her husband I have written; he will have the
news to-day:
If he cares again to see her, he had best be on
his way!"

Now the priest has done his office; at the open
door he stands,
And he says to Marianna: "I can leave her in
your hands,—
I have other work that calls me; if to-night she
chance to die,
You can say the prayers, good sister, for her
soul as well as I."

So they left her, all unaided, in the house forlorn
and sad,
Still to watch and think and labour with what
failing strength she had.
There was none to share her burden, none to
speak to, none to see—
Save a helpful boy of seven, and a restless one
of three,

Digitized by Google

And their little dark-eyed sister (she was five,
and came between),
And a baby, born that winter, which the father
had not seen.

Two days more! Her friend lay sleeping, and
she watched beside the bed:
In her arms she rocked the baby, while the Latin
prayers she said,—
Prayers to help a soul departing;—yet she never
quite despaired!
Might not yet the Lord have pity, and that
mother's life be spared?
'T was so hard to see her going—such a mother,
kind and dear!
There was ne'er another like her in the country,
far or near!
(So thought Sister Marianna.) Yet to murmur
were a sin.
But her tears kept rising, rising, though she tried
to hold them in,
Till one fell and lay there shining, on the head
that she caressed,
Small and pretty, dark and downy, lying warm
against her breast.

Digitized by Google

She was silent; something moved her that had
neither place nor part
In the grave and stately cadence of the prayers
she knew by heart.
Then she spoke, with eyes dilated, with her soul
in every word,
As to one she saw before her—"Thou hast
been a child, my Lord!
Thou hast lain as small and speechless as this
infant on my knees;
Thou hast stretched toward Thy Mother little
helpless hands like these:
Thou hast known the wants of children, then—
Oh, listen to my plea,
For one moment, Lord, remember what Thy
Mother was to Thee!
Think, when all was dark around Thee, how
her love did Thee enfold;
How she tended, how she watched Thee; how
she wrapped Thee from the cold!
How her gentle heart was beating, on that night
of tears and strife,
When the cruel guards pursued Thee, when
King Herod sought Thy life!

Digitized by Google

How her arms enclosed and hid Thee, through
that midnight journey wild!
Oh, for love of Thine own Mother, save the
mother of this child!"

Now she paused and waited breathless; for she
seemed to know and feel
That the Lord was there, and listened to her
passionate appeal.
Then she bowed her head, all trembling; but a
light was in her eye,
For her soul had heard the answer: that young
mother would not die!
Yes, the prayer of faith had saved her! And a
change began that day:
When she woke her breath was easy, and the
pain had passed away.
So the day that dawned so sadly had a bright
and hopeful close,
And a solemn, sweet thanksgiving from the
sister's heart arose.

Now the night had closed around them, and a
lonesome night it seemed!

Digitized by Google

For the sky was black and starless, and for hours
the rain had streamed:
And the wind and rain together made a wild
and mournful din,
As they beat on door and window, madly strug-
gling to come in.

Marianna, faint and weary with the strain of
many days,
On the broad stone hearth was kneeling, while
she set the fire ablaze,
For the poor lone soul she cared for would, ere
morning, need to eat.
"Now, God help me," said the sister, "this
night's labour to complete!"
'T was a meal she knew would please her,
which she lovingly prepared,
Of that best and chosen portion, from the con-
vent table spared,
Which she brought, as was her habit, with much
other needed store,
In the worn old willow basket, standing near her
on the floor.

Digitized by Google

On her work was much depending, so she planned to do her best;
And she set the earthen pitcher on the coals as in a nest,
With the embers laid around it; then she thought again, and cast
On the pile a few gray ashes, that it might not boil too fast.
But the touch of sleep was on her, she was dreaming while she planned,
And the wooden spoon kept falling from her limp and listless hand.
Then she roused her, struggling bravely with this languor, which she viewed
As a snare, a sore temptation, to be fought with and subdued.
But another fear assailed her — what if she should faint or fall?
And to-night the storm-swept cottage seems so far away from all!
How the fitful wind is moaning! And between the gusts that blow,
She can hear the torrent roaring, in the deep ravine below.

Digitized by Google

And her head is aching strangely, as it never did before:
"Good Lord, help me!" she is saying: "this can last but little more!
O my blessed Lord and Master, only help me through the night —
Only keep my eyes from closing till they see the morning light!
For that mother and that baby do so weak and helpless lie,
And with only me to serve them, — if I leave them, they may die!
She is better — yes, I know it, but a touch may turn the scale.
I can send for help to-morrow, but to-night I must not fail!"
'T was in vain; for sleep had conquered, and the words she tried to say
First became a drowsy murmur, then grew faint and died away.
And she slept as sleep the weary, heedless how the night went on,
With her pitcher all untended, with her labour all undone;

Digitized by Google

On the wall her head reclining, in the chimney's
empty space,
While the firelight flared and flickered on her pale
and peaceful face.
Was her humble prayer unanswered? Oh, the
Lord has many a way
That His children little think of, to send answers
when they pray!
It was long she sat there sleeping—do you think
her work was spoiled?
No, the fir-wood fire kept burning, and the
pitcher gently boiled:
Ne'er a taint of smoke had touched it, nor one
precious drop been spilt;
When she moved and looked around her, with a
sudden sense of guilt.
But her eyes, when first they opened, saw a
vision, strange and sweet,
For a little Child was standing on the hearth-
stone at her feet.
And He seemed no earthly infant, for His robe
was like the snow,
And a glory shone about Him that was not the
firelight glow.

Digitized by Google

And Himself her work was doing! For He kept
the fire alive,
And He watched the earthen pitcher, that no
danger might arrive
To the simple meal, now ready, with the coals
around it piled;
Then He turned His face toward her, and she
knew the Holy Child.
'T was her Lord who stood before her! And
she did not shrink nor start —
There was more of joy than wonder in her all-
believing heart.
When her willing hands were weary, when her
patient eyes were closed,
He had finished all she failed in, He had watched
while she reposed.
Do you ask of His appearance? Human words
are weak and cold;
'T is enough to say she knew Him — that is all
she ever told.
Yes, as you and I will know Him when that
happy day shall come,
When, if we on earth have loved Him, He will
bid us welcome home!

Digitized by Google

But with that one look He left her, and the vision
all had passed,
(Though the peace it left within her to her dying
hour would last!)
Storm had ceased, and wind was silent, there
was no more sound of rain,
And the morning star was shining through the
window's broken pane.

Later, when the sun was rising, Marianna looked
to see,
O'er the stretch of rain-washed country, what
the day was like to be,
While the door she softly opened, letting in the
morning breeze,
As it shook the drops by thousands from the
wet and shining trees.
And she saw the sky like crystal, for the clouds
had rolled away,
Though they lay along the valleys, in their folds
of misty grey,
Or to mountain sides were clinging, tattered
relics of the storm.
And among the trees below her she could see a
moving form;

Digitized by Google

'T was the husband home returning, yes, thank
God! he came at last:
There was no one else would hasten up that
mountain road so fast.
Now the drooping boughs concealed him, now
he came in sight again;
All night long had he been walking in the dark-
ness, in the rain;
Through the miles of ghostly forest, through the
villages asleep,
He had borne his burden bravely, till he reached
that hillside steep;
And as yet he seemed not weary, for his spring-
ing step was light,
But his face looked worn and haggard with the
anguish of the night.
Now his limbs began to tremble, and he walked
with laboured breath,
For he saw his home before him, should he find
there life or death?
How his heart grew faint within him as he
neared the wished-for place!
One step more, his feet had gained it, they were
standing face to face.

Digitized by Google

"God has helped us!" was her answer to the question in his eye;
And her smile of comfort told him that the danger had gone by.

It was morning now, fair morning! and the broken sunlight fell
Through the boughs that crossed above her, where the buds began to swell,
As adown the sloping pathway, that her feet so oft had pressed,
Went the Sister Marianna to her convent home to rest.
It was spring that breathed around her, for the winter strove no more,
And the snowdrifts all had vanished with the rain the night before.
Now a bee would flit beside her, as she lightly moved along;
Or a bird among the branches tried a few low notes of song.
But her heart had music sweeter than the bird-notes in her ears!
She was leaving joy behind her in that home of many tears:

Digitized by Google

Hope was there, and health returning; there
were happy voice and smile,
For the father at his coming had brought plenty
for a while.
And she knew with whom she left them, for
herself His care had proved,
When her mortal eyes were opened, and she saw
the face she loved,
On that night of storm and trouble, when to help
her He had come,
As He helped His own dear Mother in their
humble earthly home.

As she went the day grew warmer; sweeter
came the wild bird's call;
Then, what made her start and linger? 'T was
a perfume, that was all:
Faint, but yet enough to tell her that the violets
were in bloom;
And she turned aside to seek them, for that pic-
ture in her room.

Digitized by Google

The Lupins

Digitized by Google

THE simple story of "The Lupins" is very commonly known among the country people, who often quote it as a remedy for discontent.

Digitized by Google

The Lupins

'TWAS a day in late November,
When the fruits were gathered in;
Day to dream in, and remember
All the beauty that had been.

Peacefully the year was dying;
Soft the air, and deep the blue;
Brown and bare the fields were lying,
Where the summer harvest grew.

Autumn flowers had bloomed and seeded;
Yet a few of humblest kind,
Waiting till they most were needed,
Brought the pleasant days to mind.

Here and there a red-tipped daisy
Still its small bright face would show;
While above the distance hazy
Rose the mountains, white with snow.

Digitized by Google

With a light subdued and tender,
Shone the sun on vale and hill,
Where the faded autumn splendour
Left a sober sweetness still.

By a road that wandered, winding,
Far among the hills away,
Walked a man, despondent, finding
Little comfort in the day.

Pale of tint and fine of feature,
Formed with less of strength than grace,
Seldom went a sadder creature,
Seeking work from place to place.

He from noble race descended,
Heir to wealth and honoured name,
Who had oft the poor befriended
When about his door they came,

By a brother's evil doing
Had to poverty been brought:
Now his listless way pursuing,
Ever on the past he thought.

Digitized by Google

He, to hope no longer clinging,
Drifted, led he knew not where,
By a sound of far-off singing
Floating in the dreamy air,—

Many voices sweetly blending,
Sounding o'er the hills remote,
Every verse the same, and ending
In one plaintive, long-drawn note.

"Olive gatherers, I know them,
Singing songs from tree to tree;
If the road will lead me to them,
There are food and work for me."

He a humble meal was making,
While he warmed him in the sun;
From his pocket slowly taking
Yellow lupins, one by one.

Most forlorn he felt and lonely,
While he ate them on the way;
For those lupins, and they only,
Were his food for all the day.

Digitized by Google

Since to shame his brother brought him,
Want had often pressed him sore;
Yet misfortune never brought him
Quite so low as this before!

"If my lot be hard and painful,
There's one comfort still for me;"
(Said he, with a smile disdainful,)
"Poorer, I can never be.

"There's no lower step to stand on,
No more burning shame to feel:
Not a crust to lay my hand on,
Only lupins for a meal!"

He could see the laden table
Where his parents used to dine:
Well for them who were not able
Then the future to divine.

Oh, but he was glad God took them
Ere they saw him fall so low:
How their cherished hope forsook them,
They had never lived to know.

Digitized by Google

"I, so dearly loved and cared for,
I, on whom such hopes were built,
Whom such blessings were prepared for --
Ruined by a brother's guilt!"

Now he wrung his hands despairing,
Stamped his foot upon the ground;
Bitter thoughts his heart were tearing, —
When he heard a footstep sound.

Then he started, sobered quickly,
Took an attitude sedate,
With that terror, faint and sickly,
Which he often felt of late.

What if some old friend should find him?
But he turned, the story tells,
And he saw a man behind him,
Picking up the lupin shells;

Picking up the shells and eating
What the other cast away.
Now abashed, their eyes were meeting:
'T was a beggar, worn and gray,

Digitized by Google

Hollow-eyed and thin and wasted;
By his look you might suppose,
He had ne'er a morsel tasted
Since the sun that morning rose.

Stood the younger man astonished,
And no more bewailed his fate;
Only bowed his head, admonished
By the sight of want so great.

Then he said: "Come here, my brother,
And the lupins we will share;
Maybe, if we help each other,
God will have us in His care."

"Thank the Lord! and you, kind master!
May He help you in your need;
Save your soul from all disaster
And remember your good deed!"

Said the beggar, smiling brightly.
And the other thus replied, —
Now content, and walking lightly
By his poorer neighbour's side, —

Digitized by Google

"Friend, you have a blessing brought me,
And I thank you in my turn,
For a lesson you have taught me
Which I needed much to learn.

"And henceforth will I endeavour
Not to pine for fortune high,
But remember there is ever
Some one lower down than I.

"But alas, when I was younger,
Wealth and honoured state were mine;
Shame, my friend, is worse than hunger:
'T is for this that I repine."

Then the beggar rose up stately,
Looked the other in the face,
Saying (for he wondered greatly),
"Poverty is no disgrace;

"For our Lord, I think, was poorer
Once than you or even I,
And His poor of Heaven are surer
Than the rich who pass them by."

Digitized by Google

So the two went on together,
Casting on the Lord their care,
Happy in the balmy weather,
Happy in their simple fare.

Now an ancient olive o'er them
Threw its slender lines of shade,
Bending low its boughs before them,
Silver-leafed that cannot fade;

Bearing fruit in winter season,
Still through every change the same:
Tree of peace — they had good reason
Who have called it by that name!

And with that the story leaves them;
You can end it as you please:
Gain that cheers, or loss that grieves them,
Life of toil, or life of ease.

Did some fortune unexpected
Give to one his wealth again?
Or did both, forlorn, neglected,
End their days in want and pain?

Digitized by Google

Many years have they been dwelling
Where such trifles of the way
Are not counted worth the telling!
Both are with the Lord to-day.

He in whom their souls confided
Did for both a home prepare;
Yet that humble meal divided
Gives a blessing even there.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Silver Cross

Digitized by Google

THE story of "St. Caterina of Siena and her Silver Cross" is one of her many visions, recorded by her confessor.

Digitized by Google

The Silver Cross

THROUGH the streets of old Siena, at the dawning of the day,
Went the holy Caterina, as the bells began to sound;
With the light of peace celestial in her eyes of olive gray,
For her soul was with the angels, while her feet were on the ground.

She was fair as any lily, with as delicate a grace;
And the air of early morning had just tinged her cheek with rose:
Yet one hardly thought of beauty in that pale, illumined face,
That the souls in trouble turned to, finding comfort and repose.

And the men their heads uncovered, though they dared not speak her praise,
When they saw her like a vision down the narrow street descend;

Digitized by Google

And they wondered what she looked at, with
that far-off dreamy gaze,
While her lips were often moving, as though
talking to a friend.

There were few abroad so early, and she scarcely
heard a sound,
Save the cooing of the pigeons, as about her feet
they strayed,
Or the bell that sweetly called her to the church
where she was bound;
While the palaces around her stood in silence
and in shade.

And the towers built for warfare rose about her,
dark and proud,
But their summits caught a glory, as the morn-
ing onward came,
And the summer sky beyond them was alight
with fleecy cloud,
Where the gray of dawn was changing, first to
rose and then to flame.

Digitized by Google

By a shrine of the Madonna, at a corner where she passed,
Stood a stranger leaning on it, as though weary and forlorn,
With a bundle slung behind him and a cloak about him cast;
For he shivered in the freshness of the pleasant summer morn.

Said the stranger, "Will you help me?" and she looked on him and knew,
By his hand that trembled feebly as he held it out for aid,
By his eyes that were so heavy, and his lips of ashen hue,
That the terrible Maremma had its curse upon him laid.

So she listened to his story, that was pitiful to hear,
Of a widowed mother waiting on the mountain for her son;

Digitized by Google

How to help her he had laboured till the summer time drew near,
And of how the fever took him just before his work was done.

He was young and he was hopeful, and the smile began to come
In his eyes, as though they thanked her for the pity she bestowed,
And he said: "I shall recover if I reach my mountain home,
And if some good Christian people will but help me on the road.

"For I go to Casentino, where the air is pure and fine,
But my strength too often fails me, and the place is far away;
So I pray you give me something, for a little bread and wine,
That I may not set out fasting on my weary walk to-day."

Digitized by Google

Then a certain faint confusion with her pity
seemed to blend,
And her face, so sweet and saintly, showed the
shadow of a cloud,
As she said: "I am no lady, though you call me
so, my friend,
But a poor Domenicana who to poverty am
vowed.

"I can give a prayer to help you on your journey,
nothing more,
For these garments I am wearing are the sister-
hood's, not mine,
And the very bread they gave me when I left
the convent door
To a beggar by the wayside I this morning did
consign.

"I would give you all you ask for if I had it to
command."
Then she sighed and would have left him, but
the stranger made her stay,

Digitized by Google

For he held her by the mantle, with his cold and wasted hand:
"For the love of Christ, my lady, do not send me thus away!"

He had used the name unthinking, but it moved her none the less,
And she turned again toward him, with a softened, solemn air,
While her hand began to wander up and down her simple dress,
As though vaguely it were seeking for some trifle she could spare.

Then the rosary she lifted that was hanging at her waist,
And its silver cross unfastened, which was small and very old,
With the edges worn and rounded and the image half effaced,
Yet she loved it more than lady ever loved a cross of gold.

Digitized by Google

It had been her life companion, in the tempest, in the calm;
She had held it to her bosom when she prayed with troubled mind;
And she kissed it very gently, as she laid it in his palm,
"For the love of Christ, then, take it; 't is the only thing I find."

So he thanked her and departed, and she thought of him no more,
Save to ask the Lord to help him, when that day in church she prayed;
But the cross of Caterina on his heart the stranger wore,
And her presence unforgotten like a blessing with him stayed.

Now the city life is stirring, and the streets are in the sun,
And the bells ring out their music o'er the busy town again,

Digitized by Google

As the people slowly scatter from the church where Mass is done;
But the blessèd Caterina in her seat did still remain.

For the sleep divine was on her, which so often to her came,
When of mortal life the shadow from around her seemed to fall;
And she looked on things celestial with her happy soul aflame:
But that day the dream that held her was the sweetest of them all.

For the Lord appeared in glory, and he seemed to her to stand
In a chamber filled with treasures such as eye had never seen;
And a cross of wondrous beauty He was holding in His hand,
Set with every stone most precious and with pearls of light serene.

Digitized by Google

And He told her that those treasures were the
presents He received
From the souls on earth who love Him, and are
seeking Him to please.
Were they deeds of noble service? that was what
she first believed,
And she thought, "What happy people who can
bring Him gifts like these!"

For herself could offer nothing, and she sighed
to think how far
From the best she ever gave him were the gems
in that bright store.
But He held the cross toward her, that was
shining like a star,
And He bade her look and tell Him had she seen
it e'er before.

"No," she answered humbly, "never did my
eyes the like behold."
But a flood of sudden sweetness came upon her
like a wave,

Digitized by Google

For she saw among the jewels and the work of beaten gold
Was the little Cross of Silver that for love of Christ she gave.

And I think her dream that morning was a message from above,
That a proof of deepest meaning we might learn and understand, —
Though our very best be worthless that we give for Jesus' love,
It will change and turn to glory when He takes it in His hand.

Digitized by Google

The Tears of Repentance

Digitized by Google

THE TEARS OF REPENTANCE I found in a book called *Maravviglie di Dio ne' Suoi Santi*, by the Jesuit Father, Padre Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli, printed at Bologna in 1696. He says it was written originally by Theophilus Raynaudus.

Digitized by Google

The Tears of Repentance

Part First

THE MOUNTAIN

A WILD, sad story I tell to-day,
And I pray you to listen all!
You cannot think how my heart is moved
As the legend I recall, —

The legend that made me weep so oft,
When I was a child like you!
I tell it now, in my life's decline,
And it brings the tears anew.

It came to us down through ages long;
For this story had its scene
In the far-away, gorgeous, stormy days
Of the empire Byzantine.

And it tells of a famous mountain chief,
A terrible, fierce brigand,
Who ravaged the country, far and wide,
At the head of an armèd band.

Digitized by Google

So hard of heart was this evil man
That he spared not young nor old:
He killed and plundered, and burned and spoiled,
In his maddening thirst for gold;

Would come with a swoop on a merchant troop,
That peacefully went its way,
And the counted gains of a journey long
Were scattered in one short day!

He knew no pity, he owned no law,
Nor human, nor yet divine;
Would take the gold from a Prince's chest,
Or the lamp from a wayside shrine.

In hidden valley, in wild ravine,
On desolate, heath-grown hill,
He buried his treasure away from sight,
And most of it lies there still.

And none were free in that land to dwell,
Except they a tribute paid;
For the robber chief, who was more than king,
Had this burden on them laid.

Digitized by Google

If any dared to resist the claim,
He was met with vengeance dire;
His lands were wasted before the dawn,
And his harvest burned with fire.

And some day maybe himself was slain,
And left in the road to lie;
To fill with terror the quaking heart
Of the next who journeyed by.

And many fled to the towns afar,
And their fields were left untilled;
While want and trouble and trembling fear
Had the stricken country filled.

High up on a mountain's pathless side
Had the robber made his den,
In a rocky cave, where he reigned supreme
Over twenty lawless men.

A price had long on his head been set,
But for that he little cared;
For few were they who could climb the way,
And fewer were those who dared.

Digitized by Google

For those who hunted him long before
Had a fearful story brought:
They were not men on the mountain side,
But demons who with them fought!

For horrible forms arose, they said,
As if from the earth they grew;
And rolled down rocks from the cliffs above
On any who might pursue.

From town to town and from land to land,
Had his evil fame been spread;
And voices lowered and lips grew grave
When the hated name they said.

The people's heart had grown faint with fear,
And they thought no hope remained;
But hope again on their vision dawned,
When the Emperor's ear they gained.

Mauritius reigned o'er the nations then;
He was great in warlike fame,
And he was not one to shrink or quake
At a mountain bandit's name.

Digitized by Google

He sent a band of a hundred strong
For the troubled land's release,
To kill the man and his bloody crew,
And to give the country peace.

For what was a robber chief to him?
He had conquered mighty kings;
He gave the order, and then 't was done,
And he thought of other things.

But few, alas, of that troop returned,
And they told a ghostly tale;
And women wept, and the strongest men,
As they heard, grew mute and pale.

Those soldiers oft in the war had been,
And they counted danger light;
From mortal foe had they never turned,
But with demons who could fight?

The Emperor silent was and grave,
For his thoughts were deep and wise;
He saw that the robber chief was one
Whom he could not well despise.

Digitized by Google

There might be reason in what they said,
That the demons gave him aid,
And earthly weapon would ne'er be found
That could make such foes afraid.

But yet they will flee from sacred things,
And the martyred saints, he knew,
Have holy virtue, that to them clings,
That can all their spells undo.

But how could such weapon reach the soul
That for years had owned their sway?
A question grave that he pondered long;
But at length he found a way.

A reliquary he made prepare;
It was all of finest gold:
For as monarch might with monarch treat,
He would serve this bandit bold.

The gold was his, but the work he gave
To the skilled and patient hand
Of an artist monk, who counted then
For the first in all the land.

Digitized by Google

Now see him close to his labour bent,
In a cell remote and high,
Where all he saw of the world without
Was a square of roof and sky.

A holy man was this artist monk,
And for gain he did not ask,
If only the Lord his work would bless,
For his heart was in the task.

And day by day from his touch came forth
The image of holy things;
The cross was there, and the clustered vine,
And the dove with outspread wings, —

The dove that bore in her golden beak
The olive in sign of peace, —
And still, as he wrought, his hand kept time
To the prayer that would not cease!

For pity stirred in him when he thought
Of that dark and stormy breast,
So hard, so hopeless, from God so far,
Where the little shrine would rest.

Digitized by Google

And perhaps if angels were looking on,
(And I doubt not some were there!)
They saw that the work was sown with pearls,
And each pearl a burning prayer.

So weeks went on, and the shrine was done,
And within it, sealed and closed,
Were holy relics of martyred saints
Who near in the church reposed.

And trusted messengers bore it forth
To the distant mountain land;
With such a weapon they need not fear;
They could meet the famed brigand.

'T was winter now on the mountain-side,
And the way was long and hard,
As the faithful envoys upward toiled
In their bandit escort's guard, —

Toiled up to a grove of ancient firs,
For that was the place designed,
Where, after parley and long delay,
Had the meeting been combined.

Digitized by Google

No sound but their feet that crushed the snow,
And the world looked sad and dead;
They thought of lives on the mountain lost,
And it was not much they said.

The sun, as it shone with slanting ray
Through the stripped and silent trees,
Could melt but little the clinging ice
Which to-night again would freeze.

They reached the grove, and the chief was there,
Like a king in savage state;
Erect and fearless, above them all,
While his men around him wait.

He stood before them like what he was,
A terrible beast of prey;
But even tigers have something grand,
And he looked as grand as they.

But, oh, the look that he on them turned!
It was fearful to behold;
It chilled their hearts, but they did not shrink,
For their faith had made them bold.

Digitized by Google

And looking straight in those gloomy eyes,
With their hard and cruel glare,
"We come," said one, "in the Emperor's name,
And from him a token bear."

Then said the chief, with a mocking smile,
"And what may my Lord command?"
And made a sign with his evil eye,
For the men on guard to stand.

No faith had he in a tale so wild,
And he somewhat feared a snare;
There might be others in hiding near,
But he did not greatly care.

Then forth came he who the relics bore, —
'T was a prudent man and brave, —
And into the hand that all men feared,
He the holy token gave.

"This gift to you has the Emperor sent,
In token of his good will,"
He said; and at first the fierce brigand
Stood in wonder, hushed and still.

Digitized by Google

What felt he then as that holy thing
In his guilty hand he took?
What changed his face for a moment's time
To an almost human look?

There lay the shrine in his open palm,
Yet he thought it could not be:
"For me?" he asked, but his voice was strange,
And again he said, "for me?"

Three times the messenger told his tale,
And he said 't was all he knew;
The bandit looked at the wondrous work,
And he could not doubt 't was true.

So over his neck the chain he hung,
The shrine on his bosom lay
With all its wealth of a thousand prayers;
And they were not cast away.

Day followed day in the bandit's cave,
And a restless man was he;
A heart so hard and so proud as his
With the saints could ill agree.

Digitized by Google

The holy relics that on it lay
Did a strange confusion make;
In all that most he had loved before,
He could no more pleasure take.

A charm there was in the golden shrine
That had all his soul possessed;
He sat and looked at each sacred sign
With a dreamy sense of rest.

'T was not the gold that could soothe him thus,
And 't was not the work so fine:
'T was the holy soul of the artist monk,
For it lived in every line.

Like one who sleeps when the day begins,
And, before his slumbers end,
The morning light and the morning sounds
With his dreaming fancies blend;

So now and then would his heart be stirred
By a feeling strange and new,
And thoughts he never had known before
In his mind unconscious grew.

Digitized by Google

Till on a sudden his blinding pride,
Like a bubble, failed and broke;
With eyes wide open, the guilty man
From his life-long dream awoke.

From graves forgotten his crimes came forth.
In his face they seemed to stare:
To all one day will such waking come;
God grant it be here, not there.

Then wild remorse on his heart took hold,
And beneath its burning sting
He shrank from himself as one might shrink
From a venomous, hateful thing.

For scenes of blood from the years gone by
Forever before him came;
He closed his eyes, and his face he hid,
But he saw them just the same.

And in the horror he dared not pray,
For he felt his soul accurst,
And he feared to live, and he feared to die,
And he knew not which was worst.

Digitized by Google

Yet far on high, and beyond his reach,
He could see a vision dim,
A far-off glory of peace and love;
But he felt 't was not for him.

Awhile his trouble he hid from all,
For his will was iron strong,
But never was man, since man was made,
Who could bear such torment long.

A strange, sick longing was growing up
In his spirit, day by day,
A longing for what he most had feared, —
To let justice have her way;

Until the will to a purpose grew,
To the Emperor's feet to fly,
To own his sin without prayer or plea,
And then give up all and die.

And so one night, without sound or word,
Away in the dark he stole,
And all that he took for his journey long
Was the weight of a burdened soul.

Digitized by Google

They waited long in that den of crime,
But they saw their chief no more;
Or dead or living, they found him not,
Though they searched the mountain o'er.

And in the country, so long oppressed,
When his sudden flight was known,
They spoke of a wild and fearful night,
When the fiends had claimed their own.

And soon the tale to a legend turned,
And men trembling used to tell
Of how they carried him, body and soul,
To the place where demons dwell.

His men, so bold, were in mortal fear
Of what might themselves befall;
So some in a convent refuge sought,
And the rest were scattered all.

And no one climbed to their empty cave,
For 't was called a haunted place,
Though soon the summer had swept away
Of its horror every trace.

Digitized by Google

And mountain strawberries nestled low,
And delicate harebells hung,
In beauty meek, from its broken arch,
Where the swallows reared their young.

But where had he gone, that man of woe?
Had he found the rest he sought?
In haste he went, but with noiseless tread,
As his bandit life had taught.

And going downward he met the spring,
With its mingled sun and showers;
But storms of winter he bore within,
And he did not see the flowers.

And how did he live from day to day,
And the ceaseless strain endure?
Kind hearts there are that can feel for all,
And the poor will help the poor.

In frightened pity, a shepherd girl,
As she fled o'er the daisied grass,
Would let the bread from her apron fall
On the turf where he should pass;

Digitized by Google

Or workmen, eating their noonday meal
On a bank beside the way,
Would give him food, but with outstretched arm,
And they asked him not to stay.

He went like a shadow taken shape
From some vague and awful dream,
And word of comfort for him was none,
In his misery so extreme.

Alas, from himself he could not flee,
Though he tried, poor haunted man;
And he reached the city beside the sea,
As the Holy Week began.

Digitized by Google

Part Second

'T WAS Sunday morn, and a hundred bells
With their sweet and saintly sound
Were calling the people in to prayer
From the pleasant hills around, —

The morn when strivings should end in peace,
And each wrong forgotten be,
That Holy Week may its blessing shed
Upon souls from discord free.

The streets were bright with a moving throng,
And before the palace gate,
With eager eyes and in garments gay,
Did a crowd expectant wait.

For the Emperor goes in solemn state,
With his court, like all the rest,
To the church with many lamps ablaze,
Where to-day the palms are blest.

Digitized by Google

And stately ladies and timid girls,
In their modest plain attire,
From curtained windows are looking down,
And the shifting scene admire.

They come, they come, from the cool deep shade
Of the courtyard's marble arch, —
The nobles all in their rich array,
And the guards with sounding march.

And stay, the square is as still as death,
For the Emperor passes now;
The girls at the window hold their breath,
And the people bend and bow.

But who is this that among them moves
With that quick and stately pace?
What see they all in his rigid look,
That they shrink and give him place?

Too late the guards would have barred the way,
For he darted swiftly by,
As hunted creatures, when hard beset,
To man in their terror fly.

Digitized by Google

And sinking low at the feet of him
He had come so far to see,
He waited silent with folded hands,
Nor asked what his fate should be.

"Who are you, come in such deep distress,
And what is the grace you seek?"
The Emperor's voice was grave and kind,
And the stranger tried to speak.

The golden casket he raised in sight,
While he bent his eyes for shame;
Then said he, "I am that wicked man,"
And he told the dreaded name.

A shudder fell upon all who heard,
But the people nearer drew;
From mouth to mouth, in a whisper low,
The name of the bandit flew.

While he, uplifting those woful eyes,
In the boldness of despair,
With ne'er a thought of the crowd who heard,
His errand did thus declare:

Digitized by Google

"I come not here to confess my sins,
For you know them all too well;
My crimes are many and black and great,
They are more than tongue can tell.

"But here at your feet my life I lay,
I have nothing else to give;
So now, if it please you, speak the word,
For I am not fit to live."

The words came straight from his broken heart
In such sad and simple style,
That the Emperor's firm, proud lips were moved
To a somewhat softened smile.

For his warlike spirit felt the charm
Of that savage strength and grace,
And the strange fierce beauty that lingered still
In the dark and troubled face.

So grand of form and so lithe of limb,
And still in his manhood's prime,
'T would be a pity for one like him
To perish before his time.

Digitized by Google

And 't was well to see him kneeling there,
Whose terror had filled the land,
Like a captive tiger, caught and tamed
By his own imperial hand.

"Arise," he said, "you have nought to fear,
Take comfort and go your way,
And may God in heaven my sins forgive,
As I pardon yours to-day."

A murmur rose from the crowded square,
At the sound of words like these;
For some rejoiced in the mercy shown,
And others it did not please.

Some thanked the Lord for the pardoned man,
And some were to scorn inclined;
And motherly women wiped their eyes,
For the women's hearts are kind.

"God bless our Emperor," many said;
But others began to frown,
And asked, "Will he turn this wild brigand
Adrift in our peaceful town?"

Digitized by Google

No word of thanks did the bandit say,
But he raised one shining fold
Of the robe imperial, trailing low
With its weight of gems and gold.

The border first to his lips he pressed,
And then to his heavy heart;
Then rose and waited with bended head,
Till he saw them all depart.

No eye had he for the gorgeous train,
As along the square it passed;
One stately presence was all he knew,
And he watched it till the last.

A heavy sigh, and he turned away,
But with slow and weary tread;
No rest as yet on the earth for him,
Not even among the dead.

He lived, and he bore his burden still,
But the dumb despair had ceased:
That word of mercy had brought a change,
And he now had tears, at least;

Digitized by Google

He now could pray, though it brought not light,
And he seemed to ask in vain,
And his prayer had more of tears than words,
But it helped him bear the pain.

And oft in church did they see him kneel
In some corner all alone,
And weep till the great hot drops would fall
On the floor of varied stone.

And children clung to their mothers' hand,
When they saw that vision wild, —
That haggard face, and that wasting form,
And those lips that never smiled.

But grief was wearing his life away,
And for him perhaps 't was well;
It was not long on the city street
That his saddening shadow fell.

A fever slowly within him burned,
Till the springs of life were dry,
And glad he was when they laid him down
On a hospital bed to die.

Digitized by Google

His heart was broken, his strength was gone,
He had no more wish to live;
He almost hoped that the Lord on high,
Like the Emperor, might forgive;

That somewhere down in the peaceful earth
He should find a refuge yet,
A place to rest and his eyes to close,
And the woful past forget.

He could not lie where the others lay,
For such gloom around him spread,
That soon in a chamber far away
Had they set his friendless bed.

'T was there he suffered and wept and prayed,
From the eyes of all concealed:
Alas! but it takes a weary time
For a life like his to yield.

The grand old hospital where he died
Was beneath the watchful care
Of a certain doctor, famed afar
For his skill and learning rare.

Digitized by Google

But more than learning and more than skill
Was his heart, so large and kind,
That knew the trouble and felt the needs
Of the sick who near him pined.

With conscience pure had he served the Lord
From youth till his hair was grey,
Yet only pity he felt, not scorn,
For the many feet that stray.

In troubled scenes had his life been passed;
He was used to woe and sin,
And when men suffered he did not ask
If their lives had blameless been.

His part was but to relieve their pain,
And he helped and soothed and cheered;
But most he cared for the stricken man
Whom the others shunned and feared.

Each art to save him he tried in vain,
And it could but useless prove,
For the poisoned thorn that pierced his heart
Could no earthly hand remove.

Digitized by Google

When hope had failed, he would kneel and pray,
And his heart with tears outpour,
That God in mercy would comfort send
To that soul in torment sore.

And though the burden he might not lift,
He could help its weight to bear;
He talked of mercy, of peace to come,
And he bade him not despair.

And so, on the last sad night of all,
'T was the brave, good doctor came
To watch alone by the bandit's side,
When he died of grief and shame.

The spring to summer was wearing on,
'T was the fairest night in May,
When sleep to those eyes in mercy came,
And the deadly strain gave way.

No candle burned, for the moon was full,
And the peaceful splendour fell
Through the open window, lighting all:
It was like a kind farewell.

Digitized by Google

And scents from the garden floated in,
And the silent fireflies came,
And breathed and vanished, and breathed again,
With their soft mysterious flame.

The doctor watched with a heavy heart,
His head on his hand was bowed;
He thought how many his prayers had been,
But they could not lift the cloud.

'T was over now, there was nothing left
For his pitying love to do;
The worn-out body would rest at last,
But the guilty soul, — who knew?

No more to do but to watch and wait
Till the failing breath should cease;
He longed, as the counted minutes flew,
For one parting smile of peace.

He looked: a handkerchief veiled the eyes,
For they wept until the end,
And sadly still on the wasted cheek
Did a few slow drops descend.

Digitized by Google

The peace that oft to the dying comes
Was to him as yet denied,—
No sunset clear after stormy day,
And no brightening ere he died.

"Alas! he will go away to-night,
And without one hopeful sign,
Away from pity, away from care,
And from such poor help as mine!"

The doctor sighed, but he hoped as well,
For he said, "It cannot be
That the Lord, who died for all, will have
No mercy for such as he."

'T was then that sleep on the doctor fell,
And before him stood revealed,
In dreaming vision, a wondrous sight,
From his waking eyes concealed.

For other watchers were in the room,
And he knew the ghastly throng
Of demon spirits, the very same
Whom the man had served so long.

Digitized by Google

And two were leaning across the bed,
And another pressed behind,
And some in the shadow waiting stood,
With a chain his soul to bind.

But angels watched by the bedside too;
'T was a strange and solemn scene, —
The angels here and the demons there,
And the dying man between.

The angels looked with a troubled gaze
On the face consumed with grief,
And over the pillow bent and swayed,
As in haste to bring relief.

And one on the bowed and burdened head
Did a hand in blessing lay,
And he said, "Poor soul, come home with us,
Where the tears are wiped away."

"Not so," cried one of the demon troop,
"He is black with every sin;
And you may not touch our lawful prey
That we laboured years to win.

Digitized by Google

"We bought his soul, and the price we paid,
And our part has well been done;
We helped him ever from crime to crime,
Till his buried wealth was won;

"And we almost thought him one of us,
He had so well learned our ways;
So go, for we do but seek our own,
And be done with these delays."

The angel said, "He has wept his sin,
As none ever wept before,
Has mourned till his very life gave way,
And what could a man do more?

"And our Blessèd Lord, who pities all,
And the sins of all has borne,
Will never His mercy turn away
From a heart so bruised and torn."

"But how? and shall mercy be for him
Who has mercy never shown?
Can his sorrow bring the dead to life,
Or can tears for blood atone?

Digitized by Google

"Is he to rest with the angels now,
Has he done with tears and pain?
To-morrow morn he will wish he lay
On the hospital bed again;

"There is somewhat more to weep for down
In the place where he must stay!"
The demon looked at his fiendish mates;
And he laughed, and so did they.

And they gathered close, like hungry wolves,
In their haste to rend and tear;
But they could not touch the helpless head
While that strong white hand was there.

Then out of the shadow one came forth.
'T was a demon great and tall;
An iron balance he held on high,
As he stood before them all.

And fiercely he to the angels called,
"Do you dare to claim him still?
Then come, for the scales are in my hand,
We will weigh the good and ill."

Digitized by Google

And into the nearest scale he threw,
As he spoke, a parchment roll,
With on it a note of every sin
That had stained the parting soul.

'T was closely written, without, within,
And the balance downward flew
And struck the ground with a blow, as thou
It would break the pavement through.

"He is ours forever," the demons said,
"If justice the world controls;
For sins so heavy do on him lie,
They would sink a hundred souls!

"Come, hasten, angels, the time is short,
And words are of no avail;
Come, bring the note of your friend's good deeds,
To lay in the empty scale."

The angels searched, but they searched in vain,
There was no good deed to bring;
In all that ever that hand had done,
They could find no worthy thing.

Digitized by Google

A taunting shout from the demons broke,
And each hard malignant face
With joy and triumph was all aflame;
But the angels held their place,

Though dimness fell like a passing cloud
On their pure and holy light;
And if ever angel eyes have tears,
There were some in theirs that night.

But he who had been the first to speak,
With a glimmering hope possessed,
Still sought some good that would turn the scale,
Though it seemed a useless quest.

He saw the handkerchief where it lay,
And he raised it off the bed,
All wet and clinging, and steeped in tears
That the dying eyes had shed.

He turned around, but his face was pale,
As the last poor chance he tried;
He laid it down in the empty scale,
And he said, "Let God decide!"

Digitized by Google

When, lo! it fell till it touched the earth,
And the demons stood dismayed;
It seemed so little and light a thing,
But it all his sins outweighed.

But who shall ever the anger tell
Of that black and hateful band,
When most in triumph they felt secure,
The prey had escaped their hand.

They stood one moment in speechless rage,
And then, with a fearful sound
Of shrieks and curses and rattling chains,
They vanished beneath the ground.

Then holy peace on the chamber fell,
Till it flooded all the air;
The angels praised and they thanked the Lord,
Who so late had heard their prayer.

And their clouded glory shone again,
With a clear celestial ray,
As the trembling soul, which that moment passed,
They bore in their arms away.

Digitized by Google

Then through the room, as they took their flight,
Did a flood of music stream,
So loud, so sweet, and so close at hand,
That it waked him from his dream.

He looked around; there was nothing stirred
In the empty, moonlit room,
Where a faint, sweet odour filled the air
From the orange-trees in bloom.

And the notes divine he had thought to hear
Were only the liquid flow
Of a nightingale's song, that came up clear
From the garden just below.

Then up from his seat the doctor rose,
And he stood beside the bed;
He knew, when he touched the quiet hand,
That the poor brigand was dead.

The handkerchief on the pillow lay,
But its weary use was o'er,
And he raised it, heavy and wet with tears,
From the eyes that could weep no more.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

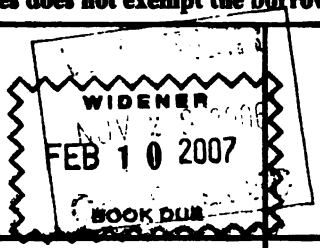
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

WIDENER LIBRARY

Harvard College, Cambridge, MA 02138: (617) 495-2413

If the item is recalled, the borrower will be notified of the need for an earlier return. (Non-receipt of overdue notices does not exempt the borrower from overdue fines.)



Thank you for helping us to preserve our collection!

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google